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Fantasy AND Science Fiction

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All Star Issue

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MARCH 40¢

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KIT REED

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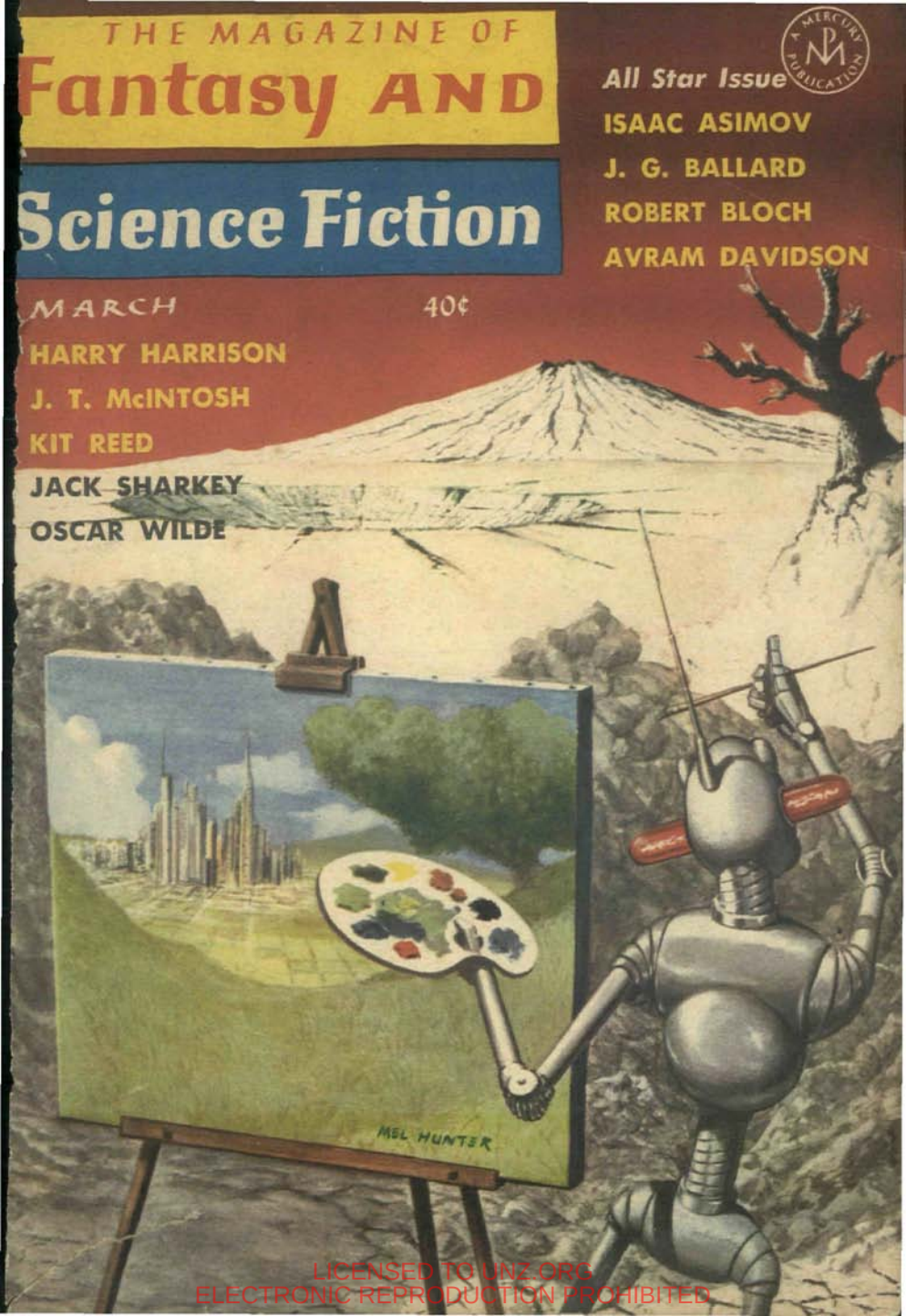

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Fantasy and Science Fiction

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Kit (Mrs. Joseph) Reed is the author of the soon to be published novel, AT WAR WITH CHILDREN (Farrar Straus). Her first novel, MOTHER ISN'T DEAD SHE'S ONLY SLEEPING (Houghton Mifflin), somewhat parallels her first F&SF story, THE WAIT (April 1958), which surprised and delighted our many myriads of readers with its description of a good young girl and her hypochondriac mother caught up in the curious ways and sexual mores *of a small town which was definitely not Middletown, Connecticut. Young Mrs. Reed has been a newspaper reporter (she was once voted New England Newspaperwoman of the Year) and navy wife; she is still a wife, and the mother of two little boys. She is, moreover, like Rosel George Brown and Shirley Jackson, a faculty wife; unlike either of them she is the wife of Joseph Reed, English Department, Wesleyan University. Her interests, she says, are house-wifery and people-watching; and she now makes her home in Middletown, Connecticut. The quality of Kit Reed's first story was sustained in her subsequent ones as it is in this most recent one. Widespread as the cult of the lion is, the lure of the tiger exceeds it in intensity. Or, so many people consider. It was a Tyger, for example, that Blake saw "burning bright / In the forests of the night"—not a Lyon. It was Shir Khan, a tiger-lord, against whom Kipling's Mowgli pitted his man-cunning. India, in fact, is the only place where lions and tigers are found together—and the tigers are gradually gaining sole sway of the turf. Nor must we forget Hilaire Belloc (in this connection at least; in others, we would be glad to); he "had an aunt in Yucatan / who bought a tiger from a man. She has it yet." Kit Reed's Benedict also bought a tiger from a man—perhaps with some gaudy notion of using it for Mr. Belloc's proposed purpose (population control,* vis-a-vis *small children)—but it burned too fiercely in the forests of his own personal night . . .*

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AUTOMATIC TIGER

by Kit Reed

HE GOT THE TOY FOR HIS SECOND cousin Randolph, a knobby-kneed boy so rich he was still in short trousers at thirteen. Born poor, Benedict had no hope of inheriting his Uncle James's money but he spent too much for the toy anyway. He had shriveled under his uncle's watery diamond eyes on two other weekend visits, shrinking in oppressive, dark-paneled rooms, and he wasn't going back to Syosset unarmed. The expensive gift for Randolph, the old man's grandson, should assure him at least some measure of respect. But there was more to it than that. He had felt a strange, almost feted feeling growing in him from the moment he first spotted the box, solitary and proud, in the dim window of a toy store not far from the river.

It came in a medium-sized box with an orange-and-black illustration and the words ROYAL BENGAL TIGER in orange lettering across the top. According to the description on the package, it responded to commands which the child barked into a small microphone. Benedict had seen robots and monsters something like it on television that year. Own It With Pride, the box commanded. Edward Benedict, removed from toys more by income than by inclination, had no idea that the tiger cost ten times as much as any of its mechanical counterparts. Had he known, he probably wouldn't have cared. It would impress the boy, and something about the baleful eyes on the box attracted him. It cost him a month's salary and seemed cheap at the price. After all, he told himself, it had real fur.

He wanted more than anything to open the box and touch the fur but the clerk was watching him icily so he fell back and let the man attack it with brown paper and twine. The clerk pushed the box into his arms before he could ask to have it delivered and he took it without question, because he hated scenes. He thought about the tiger all the way home on the bus. Like any man with a toy, he knew he wouldn't be able to resist opening it to try it out.

His hands were trembling as he set it in a corner of his living room.

"Just to see if it works," he muttered. "Then I'll wrap it for Randolph." He removed the brown paper and turned the box so the picture of the tiger was on top.

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Not wanting to rush things, he fixed his dinner and ate it facing the box. After he had cleared the table he sat at a distance, studying the tiger. As shadows gathered in the room something about the drawing seemed to compel him, to draw him to the verge of something important and hold him there, suspended, and he couldn't help feeling that he and this tiger were something more than man and toy, gift and giver, and as the pictured tiger regarded him its look grew more and more imperative, so that he got up finally and went over to the box and cut the string.

As the sides fell away he dropped his hands, disappointed at first by the empty-looking heap of fur. The fur had a ruggy look and for a minute he wondered if the packers at the factory had made a mistake. Then, as he poked it with his toe he heard a click and the steel frame inside the fur sprang into place and he fell back, breathless, as the creature took shape.

It was a full-sized tiger, made from a real tiger-skin skillfully fitted to a superstructure of tempered metal so carefully made that the beast looked no less real than the steely-limbed animals Benedict had seen at the city zoo. Its eyes were of amber, ingeniously lit from behind by small electric bulbs, and Benedict noted hysterically that its whiskers were made of stiff nylon filament. It stood motionless in an aura of jungle-bottom and power, waiting for him to find the microphone and issue a command. An independent mechanism inside it lashed the long, gold-and-black striped tail. It filled half the room.

Awed, Benedict retreated to his couch and sat watching the tiger. Shadows deepened and soon the only light in the room came from the creature's fierce amber eyes. It stood rooted in the corner of the room, tail lashing, looking at him yellowly. As he watched it his hands worked on the couch, flexing and relaxing, and he thought of himself on the couch, the microphone that would conduct his orders, the tiger in the corner waiting, the leashed potential that charged the room. He moved ever so slightly and his foot collided with something on the floor. He picked it up and inspected it. It was the microphone. Still he sat, watching the gorgeous beast in the light cast by its own golden eyes. At last, in the dead stillness of late night or early morning, strangely happy, he brought the microphone to his lips and breathed into it tremulously.

The tiger stirred.

Slowly, Edward Benedict got to his feet. Then, calling on all his resources, he brought his voice into his throat.

"Heel," he said.

And hugely, magnificently, the

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tiger moved into place.

"Sit," he said, leaning shakily against the door, not quite ready to believe.

The tiger sat. Even sitting it was as tall as he, and even now, in repose, with glossy fur lying smooth and soft against the body, every line spoke of the coiled steel within.

He breathed into the microphone again, marveling as the tiger lifted one paw. It held the paw to its chest, looking at him, and it was so immense, so strong, so responsive that Benedict, in a burst of confidence, said, "Let's go for a walk" and opened the door. Avoiding the elevator he opened the fire door at the end of the corridor and started down the stairs, exulting as the tiger followed him silently, flowing like water over the dingy steps.

"Shhhhhh." Benedict paused at the door to the street and behind him the tiger stopped. He peered out. The street was so still, so unreal that he knew it must be three or four in the morning. "Follow me," he whispered to the tiger, and stepped out into the darkness. They walked the dark sides of the streets, with the tiger ranging behind Benedict, disappearing into the shadows when it looked as if a car might pass too close. Finally they came to the park, and once they had traveled a few yards down one of the asphalt paths the tiger began to stretch its legs like a horse in slow motion, moving restlessly at Benedict's heels. He looked at it and in a rush of sorrow realized that a part of it still belonged to the jungle, that it had been in its box too long and it wanted to run.

"Go ahead," he said congestedly, half-convinced he would never see it again.

With a bound the cat was off, running so fast that it came upon the park's small artificial lake before it realized it, spanned the water in a tremendous leap and disappeared into the bushes at the far side.

Alone, Benedict slumped on a bench, fingering the flat metal microphone. It was useless now, he was sure. He thought about the coming weekend, when he would have to appear at his uncle's door empty-handed ("I had a toy for Randolph, Uncle James, but it got away. . . ."), about the money he had wasted (then, reflecting on the tiger, the moments they had spent together in his apartment, the vitality that had surged in the room just once for a change, he knew the money hadn't been wasted). The tiger . . . Already burning to see it again, he picked up the microphone. Why should it come back when it was free again, and it had the whole park, the whole world to roam? Even now, despairing, he couldn't keep himself from whispering the command.

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"Come back," he said fervently. "Come back." And then, "Please."

For a few seconds, there was nothing. Benedict strained at the darkness, trying to catch some rustle, some faint sound, but there was nothing until the great shadow was almost upon him, clearing the bench across the way in a low, flat leap and stopping, huge and silent, at his feet.

Benedict's voice shook. "You came back," he said, touched.

And the Royal Bengal Tiger, eyes glowing amber, white ruff gleaming in the pale light, put one paw on his knee.

"You came," Benedict said, and after a long pause he put a tentative hand on the tiger's head. "I guess we'd better go home," he muttered, noticing now that it was beginning to get light. "Come on—" he caught his breath at the familiarity "—Ben."

And he started for his rooms, almost running, rejoicing as the tiger sprang behind him in long, silken leaps.

"We must sleep now," he said to the tiger when they reached the apartment. Then, when he had Ben settled properly, curled nose to tail in a corner, he dialled his office and called in sick. Exhilarated, exhausted, he flung himself on the couch, not caring for once that his shoes were on the furniture, and slept.

When he woke it was almost time to leave for Syosset. In the corner, the tiger lay as he had left him, inert now, but still mysteriously alive, eyes glowing, tail lashing from time to time.

"Hi," Benedict said softly. "Hi, Ben," he said, and then grinned as the tiger raised his head and looked at him. He had been thinking about how to get the tiger packed and ready to go, but as the great head lifted and the amber eyes glowed at him Benedict knew he would have to get something else for Randolph. This was his tiger. Moving proudly in the amber light, he began getting ready for his trip, throwing clean shirts and drawers into a suitcase, wrapping his toothbrush and razor in toilet paper and slipping them into the shoe pockets.

"I have to go away, Ben," he said when he was finished. "Wait, and I'll be back Sunday night."

The tiger watched him intently, face framed by a silvery ruff. Benedict imagined he had hurt Ben's feelings. "Tell you what, Ben," he said to make him feel better, "I'll take the microphone, and if I need you I'll give you a call. Here's what you do. First you go to Manhattan and take the Triboro Bridge . . ."

The microphone fit flatly against his breast, and for reasons Benedict could not understand it changed his whole aspect.

"Who needs a toy for Randolph?" He was already rehearsing several brave speeches he would

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make to Uncle James. "I have a tiger at home."

On the train, he beat out several people for a seat next to the window. Later, instead of taking a bus or cab to his uncle's place, he found himself calling and asking that someone be sent to pick him up at the station.

In his uncle's dark-paneled study, he shook hands so briskly that he startled the old man. Randolph, knees roughened and burning pinkly, stood belligerently at one elbow.

"I suppose you didn't bring me anything," he said, chin out.

For a split second, Benedict faltered. Then the extra weight of the microphone in his pocket reminded him. "I have a *tiger* at home," he murmured.

"Huh? Wuzzat?" Randolph jabbed him in the ribs. "Come on, let's have it."

With a subvocal growl, Benedict cuffed him on the ear.

Randolph was the picture of respect from then on. It had been simple enough—Benedict just hadn't thought of it before.

Just before he left that Sunday night, his Uncle James pressed a sheaf of debentures into his hand.

"You're a fine young man, Edward," the old man said, shaking his head as if he still couldn't believe it. "Fine young man."

Benedict grinned broadly. "Goodbye, Uncle James." I have a *tiger* at home.

Almost before his apartment door closed behind him he had taken out the microphone. He called the tiger to his feet and embraced the massive head. Then he stepped back. The tiger seemed bigger, glossier somehow, and every hair vibrated with a life of its own. Ben's ruff was like snow. Benedict had begun to change too, and he spent a long, reflective moment in front of the mirror, studying hair that seemed to crackle with life, a jaw that jutted ever so slightly now.

Later, when it was safe to go out, they went to the park. Benedict sat on a bench and watched his tiger run, delighting in the creature's springy grace. Ben's forays were shorter this time, and he kept returning to the bench to rest his chin on Benedict's knee.

In the first glimmer of the morning Ben raced away once more, taking the ground in flat, racing bounds. He veered suddenly and headed for the lake in full knowledge that it was there, a shadowed streak, clearing the water in a leap that made Benedict come to his feet with a shout of joy.

"Ben!"

The tiger made a second splendid leap and came back to him. When Ben touched his master's knee this time Benedict threw away his coat, yelling, and wheeled and ran with him. Benedict sprinted beside the tiger, careering down flat walks, drinking in the

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night. They were coursing down the last straight walk to the gate when a slight, feminine figure appeared suddenly in the path in front of them, hands outflung in fear, and as they slowed she turned to run and threw something all in the same motion, mouth open in a scream that couldn't find voice. Something squashy hit Ben on the nose, and he shook his head and backed off. Benedict picked it up. It was a pocketbook.

"Hey, you forgot your . . ." He started after her, but as he remembered he'd have to explain the tiger, his voice trailed off and he stopped, shoulders drooping helplessly, until Ben nudged him. "Hey, Ben," he said, wondering. "We *scared* her."

He straightened his shoulders, grinning. "How about that." Then, with a new bravado he opened the purse, counted out several bills. "We'll make it look like a robbery. Then the cops'll never believe her story about a tiger." He placed the purse out in the open, where she would see it, and then absently pocketed the bills, making a mental note to pay the woman back some day. "Come Ben," he said softly, "Let's go home."

Spent, Benedict slept the morning through, head resting on the tiger's silken shoulder. Ben kept watch, amber eyes unblinking, the whipping of his tail the only motion in the silent room.

He woke well after noon, alarmed at first bcause he was four hours late for work. Then he caught the tiger's eye and laughed. *I have a tiger.* He stretched luxuriously, yawning, and ate a slow breakfast and took his time about getting dressed. He found the debentures his uncle had given him on the dresser, figured them up and found they would realize a sizeable sum.

For some days he was content to be lazy, spending afternoons in movies and evenings in restaurants and bars, and twice he even went to the track. The rest of the time he sat and watched the tiger. As the days passed he went to better and better restaurants, surprised to find that headwaiters bowed deferentially and fashionable women watched him with interest—all, he was sure, because he had a tiger at home. There came a day when he was tired of commanding waiters alone, restless in his new assurance, compelled to find out how far it would take him. He had spent the last of the proceeds from the debentures and (with a guilty twinge) the money he'd taken from the woman in the park. He began reading the business section of The Times with purpose, and one day he copied down an address and picked up the microphone.

"Wish me luck, Ben," he whispered, and went out.

He was back an hour later, still

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shaking his head, bemused. "Ben, you should have seen me. He'd never even heard of me—but he begged me to take the job—I had him cornered—I was a tiger—" he flushed modestly "—meet the second vice president of the Pettigrew Works."

The tiger's eyes flickered and grew bright.

That Friday, Benedict brought home his first paycheck, and early the next morning it was Benedict who led the way to the park. He ran with the tiger until his eyes were swimming from the wind, and he ran with the tiger the next morning and every morning after that, and as they ran he grew in assurance. "I have a *tiger* at home," he would tell himself in time of crisis, and then he would forge on to the next thing. He carried the microphone like a talisman, secure in the knowledge that he could whisper in it at any time, and call the tiger to his side. He was named a first vice president in a matter of days.

Even as his career progressed and he became a busy, important man, he never forgot the morning run. There were times when he would excuse himself from a party in a crowded night club to take his tiger ranging in the park, sprinting beside him in his tuxedo, boiled shirt-front gleaming in the dark. Even as he became bolder, more powerful, he remained faithful.

Until the day he made his biggest deal. His employer had sent him to lunch with Quincy, their biggest customer, with instructions to sell him sixteen gross.

"Quincy," Benedict said, "You need twenty gross." They were sitting against a tiger-striped banquette in an expensive restaurant. Quincy, a huge, choleric man would have terrified him a month before.

"You've got your nerve," Quincy blustered. "What makes you think I want twenty gross?"

". . ." For a second Benedict retreated. Then the tiger striping touched a chord in him and he snapped forward. "Of course you don't *want* twenty gross," he rumbled. "You need them."

Quincy brought thirty gross. Benedict was promoted to general manager.

New title resting lightly on his shoulders, he gave himself the rest of the afternoon off. He was springing toward the door on cat feet when he was interrupted in midflight by an unexpected silky sound. "Well, Madeline," he said.

The secretary, dark, silk-skinned, unapproachable until now, had come up beside him. She seemed to be trying to tell him something—something inviting.

On impulse, he said, "You're coming to dinner with me tonight, Madeline."

Her voice was like velvet. "I have a date, Eddy— my rich uncle from Cambridge is in town."

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He snorted. "The—uh—uncle who gave you that mink? I've seen him. He's too fat," and he added in a growl that dissolved her, "I'll be at your place at eight."

"Why, Eddy . . . All right." She looked up through furred lashes. "But I should warn you— I am not an inexpensive girl."

"You'll cook dinner of course— then we may do the town." He patted his wallet pocket, and then nipped her ear. "Have steak."

As he rummaged in his sock drawer that night, his hand hit something hard, and he pulled it out with a crawly, sinking feeling. The microphone—somehow he'd forgotten it this morning. It must have fallen in among his socks while he was dressing, and he'd been without it all day. All day. He picked it up, shaky with relief, and started to slip it into his tuxedo. Then he paused, thinking. Carefully he set it back in the drawer and shut it. He didn't need it any more. He was the tiger now.

That night, still rosy with drink and the heady sounds of music and Madeline's breath coming and going in his ear, he went to bed without undressing and slept until it got light. When he woke and padded into the living room in his socks he saw Ben in the corner, diminished somehow, watching him. He had forgotten their run.

"Sorry, old fellow," he said as he left for work, giving the tiger a regretful pat.

And "Got to hustle," the next day, with a cursory caress. "I'm taking Madeline shopping."

As the days went by and Benedict saw more and more of the girl, he forgot to apologize. And the tiger remained motionless in the corner as he came and went, reproaching him.

Benedict bought Madeline an Oleg Cassini.

In the corner of the living room, a fine dust began to settle on Ben's fur.

Benedict bought Madeline a diamond bracelet.

In the corner, a colony of moths found its way into the heavy fur on Ben's breast.

Benedict and Madeline went to Nassau for a week. They stopped at an auto dealer's on their way back and Benedict bought Madeline a Jaguar.

The composition at the roots of Ben's alert nylon whiskers had begun to give. They sagged, and one or two fell.

It was in the cab, on his way home from Madeline's apartment, that Benedict examined his checkbook carefully for the first time. The trip and the down payment on the car had brought his accounts to zero. And there was a payment due on the bracelet the next day. But what did it matter? He shrugged. He was a man of power. At the door to his apartment he wrote the cabbie a check, grandly adding an extra five dol-

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lars as tip. Then he went upstairs, pausing briefly to examine his tan in a mirror, and went to bed.

He awoke at three o'clock in the morning, prey to the shadows and the time of day, uneasy for the first time, and in the cold light of his bed lamp, went through his accounts again. There was less money than he'd realized—he had to go to the bank to cover the check for the cabbie, or the down payment on the Jag would bounce. But he'd written a check for the last installment on the bracelet, and that would be coming in, and the rent was overdue. . . .

He had to have money now. He sat in bed, knees drawn up, musing, and as he thought he remembered the woman he and Ben had frightened that first day, and the money in her purse, and it came to him that he would get the money in the park. He remembered rushing down on the woman, her scream, and in memory that first accidental escapade with the tiger became a daring daylight robbery—hadn't he spent the money? And as he thought back on it he decided to try it again, beginning to forget that the tiger had been with him and in fact, forgetting as he slipped into a striped sweatshirt and tied a kerchief at his throat that he was not the tiger, so that he went out without even seeing Ben in the corner, running in low, long strides, hurrying to the park.

It was still dark in the park and he paced the walks, light-footed as a cat, expanding in a sense of power as he stalked. A dark figure came through the gates—his prey—nd he growled a little, chuckling as he recognized her—the same sad woman—frightened of a tiger—and he growled again, running toward her, thinking, as he bore down on her, *I will frighten her again.*

"Hey!" she yelled, as he rushed at her and he broke stride because she hadn't shrunk from him in terror; she was standing her ground, feet a little wide, swinging her handbag.

Eyeing the pocketbook, he circled her and made another rush.

"Hand it over," he snarled.

"I beg your pardon," she said coldly, and when he rushed at her with another growl, "What's the *matter* with you?"

"The pocketbook," he said menacingly, hair bristling.

"Oh, the *pocketbook.*" Abruptly she lifted the purse and hit him on the head.

Startled, he staggered back, and before he could collect himself for another lunge, she had turned with an indignant snort and started out of the park.

It was too light now to look for another victim. He peeled off the sweatshirt and went out of the park in his shirtsleeves, walking slowly, puzzling over the aborted robbery. He was still brooding as

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he went into a nearby coffee shop for breakfast, and he worried over it as he ate his Texas steak. The snarl hadn't been quite right, he decided finally, and he straightened his tie and went too early to work.

"The Jaguar company called me," Madeline said when she came in an hour later. "Your check bounced."

"Oh?" Something in her eyes kept him from making anything of it. "Oh," he said mildly. "I'll take care of it."

"You'd better," she said. Her eyes were cold.

Ordinarily he would take this opportunity—before anyone else came in—to bite her on the neck, but this morning she seemed so distant (probably because he hadn't shaved, he decided) and he went back to his office instead, scowling over several columns of figures on a lined pad.

"It looks bad," he murmured. "I need a raise."

His employer's name was John Gilfoyle—Mr. Gilfoyle, or Sir, to most of his employees. Benedict had learned early that the use of the initials rattled him, and he used them to put himself at an advantage.

Perhaps because he was off his feed that morning, perhaps because Benedict had forgotten his coat, Gilfoyle didn't even blink. "I've no time for that today," he snapped.

"You don't seem to understand." Benedict filled his chest and paced the rug in front of the conference desk softly, noting uneasily that his shoes were muddy from the fiasco in the park, but still the tiger. "I want more money."

"Not today, Benedict."

"I could get twice as much elsewhere," Benedict said. He bored in as he always did, but there seemed to be a flaw in his attitude—perhaps he was a bit hoarse from running in the early morning air—because Gilfoyle, instead of rising with an offer, as he always did, said, "You don't look very snappy this morning, Benedict. Not like a company man."

". . . The Welchel Works offered me . . ." Benedict was saying.

"Then why don't you *go* to the Welchel Works." Gilfoyle slapped his desk, annoyed.

"You *need* me," Benedict said. He stuck out his jaw as always, but the failure in the park had left him more shaken than he realized, and he must have said it in the wrong way.

"I don't need you," Gilfoyle barked. "Get out of here or I may decide I don't even want you."

"You . . ." Benedict began.

"Get out!"

"Y—yessir." Completely unnerved, he backed out of the office.

In the corridor, he bumped into Madeline.

"About that down payment . . ." she said.

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"I—I'll tend to it. If I can just come over . . ."

"Not tonight," she sniffed. She seemed to sense a change in him. "I'm going to be a little busy."

He was too shattered to protest.

Back at his desk, he mulled over and over the figures in his notebook. At lunch he stayed in his chair, absently stroking his paperweight—a tiger-striped lump he had bought in palmier days, and as he stroked it he thought of Ben. For the first time in several weeks he dwelled on the tiger, unexpectedly, overwhelmingly homesick for him. He sat out the rest of the afternoon in misery, too unsure of himself now to leave the office before the clock told him it was time. As soon as he could he left, taking a cab with a five-spot he had found in a lower drawer, thinking all the time that at least the tiger would never desert him, that it would be good to take Ben out again, comforting to run with his old friend in the park.

Forgetting the elevator, he raced up the stairs and into his living room, stopping only to switch on a small lamp by the door. "Ben," he said, and threws his arms around the tiger's neck. Then he went into his bedroom and hunted up the microphone. He found it in his closet, under a pile of dirty drawers.

"Ben," he said softly into the microphone.

It took the tiger a long time to get to his feet. His right eye was so dim now that Benedict could hardly see him. The light behind the left eye had gone out. When his master called him to the door he moved slowly, and as he came into the lamplight, Benedict saw why.

Ben's tail was lashing only feebly, and his eyes were dimmed with dust. His coat had lost its luster, and the mechanism that moved his response to Benedict's commands had stiffened with disuse. The proud silver ruff was yellow, spotted here and there where the moths had eaten it too close. Moving rustily, the tiger pressed his head against Benedict.

"Hey, fella," Benedict said with a lump in his throat. "Hey. Tell you what," he said, stroking the thinning fur, "soon as it gets late enough we'll go out to the park. A little fresh air—" he said, voice breaking "fresh air'll put the spring back in you." With an empty feeling that belied his words, he settled himself on the couch to wait. As the tiger grew near he took one of his silver-backed brushes and began brushing the tiger's lifeless coat. The fur came out in patches, adhering to the soft bristles and Benedict saddened, put the brush aside. "It'll be OK fella," he said, stroking the tiger's head to reassure himself. For a moment Ben's eyes picked up the glow from the lamp, and Benedict tried to tell himself they had already begun to grow brighter.

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"It's time," Benedict said. "C'mon, Ben." He started out the door and down the hall, going slowly. The tiger followed him creakily, and they began the painful trip to the park.

Several minutes later the park gates loomed reassuringly, and Benedict pushed on, sure, somehow, that once the tiger was within their shelter his strength would begin to return. And it seemed true, at first, because the darkness braced the tiger in some gentle way, and he started off springily when Benedict turned to him and said, "Let's go."

Benedict ran a few long, mad steps, telling himself the tiger was right behind him and then slowed, pacing the tiger, because he realized now that if he ran at full strength Ben would never be able to keep up with him. He went at a respectable lope for some distance, and the tiger managed to keep up with him, but then he found himself going slower and slower as the tiger, trying gallantly, moved his soft feet in the travesty of a run.

Finally Benedict went to a bench and called him back, head lowered so the tiger wouldn't see that he was almost crying.

"Ben," he said, "forgive me."

The big head nudged him and as Benedict turned the faint light from the one good eye illuminated his face. Ben seemed to comprehend his expression, because he touched Benedict's knee with one paw, looking at him soulfully with his brave blind eye. Then he flexed his body and drew it under him in a semblance of his old powerful grace and set off at a run, heading for the artificial lake. The tiger looked back once and made an extra little bound, as if to show Benedict that he was his old self now, that there was nothing to forgive, and launched himself in a leap across the lake. He started splendidly, but it was too late—the mechanism had been unused for too long now, and just as he was airborne it failed him and the proud body stiffened in midair and dropped, rigid, into the lake.

When he could see well enough to make his way to the lake Benedict went forward, still grinding tears from his eyes with heavy knuckles. Dust— a few hairs—floated on the water, but that was all. Ben was gone. Thoughtfully, Benedict took the microphone from his pocket and dropped it in the lake. He stood, watching the lake until the first light of morning came raggedly through the trees, struggling to reach the water. He was in no hurry because he knew, without being told, that he was finished at the office. He would probably have to sell the new wardrobe, the silver brushes, to meet his debts, but he was not particularly concerned. It seemed appropriate, now, that he should be left with nothing. ◀

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Introduction to Avram Davidson's SACHEVERELL

Several months ago, the managing editor hurled Mr. Davidson to the floor, planted one knee on his chest and urged him (at blaster point) to dictate some biographical data to our voluptuous gal Friday. We now quote it, and we think you'll find it almost as engaging as the story which follows—E. L. F.

"Subject was born some several decades ago in a non-aristocratic section of Yonkers, N.Y., called Hog Hill—sometimes referred to by social climbers as Swine Heights—and was educated (if that is le mot juste) in the local schools, a process which nearly unfitted him forever for participation in any useful functions whatsoever. He attended four institutions of higher learning without taking a degree from any of them, mind you. During late crossness with Japan, served as US Naval Hospital Corpsman with Marines in South Pacific, and wound up feeding Epsom Salts to the inhabitants of North China; following which the defeat of Chiang Kai-shek came as no surprise. Subject will not bore you with a catalog of his various jobs, such as sheep-herding, tomato-picking, or inspector of fish livers. Sold his first F or SF story to F&SF in the year 53 or 54, being much encouraged by Anthony Boucher and Ward Moore; has since been translated into 10 languages on five continents. Author of SF collection OR ALL THE SEAS WITH OYSTERS (Berkley) factual collection CRIMES AND CHAOS (Regency); novel (with Ward Moore), JOYLEG (Pyramid); forthcoming (Pyramid) SF novel MUTINY IN SPACE (publisher's—ugh—title). Mr. Davidson is believed to be the only person to have received, for writing, both the SF Hugo *and the Mystery Writers of America* Edgar *awards. Is now working on the first of a cycle of novels of which the corpus will be called VERGIL MAGUS. He is married to the voluptuous Grania Davidson; they live in Mexico with their son, Ethan. He has no hobbies, cares for neither games nor sports, and regularly votes the straight Whig ticket."*

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SACHEVERELL

by Avram Davidson

THE FRONT WINDOWS OF THE room were boarded up, and inside it was dark and cold and smelled very bad. There was a stained mattress on which a man wrapped in a blanket lay snoring, a chair with no back; a table which held the remains of a bag of hamburgers, several punched beer cans, and a penny candle which cast shadows all around.

There was a scuffling sound in the shadows, then a tiny rattling chattering noise, then a thin and tiny voice said, tentatively, "You must be very *cold,* George . . ." No reply. "Because I know *I'm* very cold . . ." the voice faded out. After a moment it said, "He's still asleep. A man needs his rest. It's very *hard* . . ." The voice seemed to be listening for something, seemed not to hear it; after an instant, in a different tone, said, "All right."

"Hmm?" it asked the silence. The chattering broke out again for just a second, then the voice said, "Good afternoon, Princess. Good afternoon, Madame. And General —how very nice to see *you.* I wish to invite you to a tea-party. We will use the best set of doll dishes and if anyone wishes to partake of something *stronger,* I believe the Professor—" the voice faltered, continued, "—has a drop of the oh-be-joyful in a bottle on the sideboard. And now pray take seats."

The wind sounded outside; when it died away, leaving the candleflame dancing, there was a humming noise which rose and fell like a moan, then ended abruptly on a sort of click. The voice resumed, wavering at first, "Coko and Moko? No—I'm very sorry, I really can't invite them, they're very stupid, they don't know how to behave and they can't even talk . . ."

The man on the stained mattress woke in a convulsive movement that brought him sitting up with a cry. He threw his head to the right and left and grimaced and struck at the air.

"Did you have a bad *dream,* George?" the voice asked, uncertainly.

George said, *"Uhn!"* thrusting at his eyes with the cushions of his palms. He dropped his hands, cleared his throat and spat, thickly. Then he reached out and grabbed the slack of a chain lying on the floor, one end fastened to a tableleg, and began to pull it in. The

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chain resisted, he tugged, something fell and squeaked, and George, continuing to pull, hauled in his prize and seized it.

"Sacheverell—"

"I hope you didn't have a bad *dream*, George—"

"Sacheverell—was anybody here? You lie to me and—"

"No, George, honest! Nobody was here, George!"

"You lie to me and I'll kill you!"

"I wouldn't lie to you, George. I know it's wicked to lie."

George glared at him out of his reddened eyes, took a firmer grip with both hands, and squeezed. Sacheverell cried out, thrust his face at George's wrist. His teeth clicked on air, George released him, abruptly, and he scuttled away. George smeared at his trouser-leg with his sleeve, made a noise of disgust. "Look what you done, you filthy little ape!" he shouted.

Sacheverell whimpered in the shadows. "I can't help it, George. I haven't got any sphincter muscle, and you *scared* me, you *hurt* me . . ."

George groaned, huddled in under his blanket. "A million dollars on the end of this chain," he said; "and Om living in this hole, here. Like a wino, like a smokey, like a *bum!*" He struck the floor with his fist. "It don't make sense!" he cried, shifting around till he was on all fours, then pushing himself erect. Wrapping the blanket around his shoulders, he shambled quickly to the door, checked the bolt, then examined in turn the boarded-up front windows and the catch on the barred and frost-rimmed back window. Then he did something in a corner, cursing and sighing.

Under the table Sacheverell tugged on his chain ineffectually. "I don't *like* it here, George," he said. "It's cold and it's dirty and *I'm* dirty and cold, too, and I'm hungry. It's all dark here and nobody ever comes here and I don't like it, George, I don't like it here one bit. I wish I was back with the Professor again. I was very *happy* then. The Professor was nice to me and so was the Princess and Madame Opal and the General. They were the only ones in on the secret, until *you* found out."

George swung around and looked at him. One eye sparked in the candle-light.

"We used to have tea-parties and Madame Opal always brought chocolates when she came, even when she came alone, and she read love stories to me out of a magazine book with pictures and they were all true. Why can't I be back with the Professor again?"

George swallowed, and opened his mouth with a little smacking sound. "Professor Whitman died of a heart-attack," he said.

Sacheverell looked at him, head cocked. "An attack . . ."

"So he's *dead!* So forget about

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him!" the words tore out of the man's mouth. He padded across the room. Sacheverell retreated to the end of his chain.

"I don't know what the Hell Om gunna *do* . . . In a few weeks now, they'll tear this rotten building down. Maybe," he said, slyly, putting his foot down on the chain, "I'll sell you to a zoo. Where you belong." He bent, grunting, and picked up the chain.

Sacheverell's teeth began to chatter. "I *don't!*" he shrilled. "I *don't* belong in a zoo! The little people they have there are *stu*pid —they don't know how to be*have*, and they can't even *talk!*"

George closed one eye, nodded; slowly, very slowly, drew in the chain. "Come on," he said. "Level with me. Professor Whitman had a nice little act, there. How come he quit and took off and came here?" Slowly he drew in the chain. Sacheverell trembled, but did not resist.

"We were going to go to a laboratory in a college," he said. "He told me. It was a waste to keep me doing silly tricks with Coko and Moko, when I was so smart. He should have done it before, he said."

George's mouth turned up on one side, creasing the stubble. "Naa, Sacheverell," he said. "That don't make sense. You know what they do to monkeys in them labs? They cut 'em up. That's all. I *know*. I went to one and I asked. They pay about fifteen bucks and then they cut 'em up." He made a scissors out of his fingers and went *k'khkhkhkh* . . . Sacheverell shuddered. George set his foot on the chain again and took hold of him by the neck. He poked him in the stomach with his finger, stiff. It had grown colder, the man's breath shown misty in the tainted air. He poked again. Sacheverell made a sick noise, struggled. "Come on," George said. "Level with me. There's a million dollars inside of you, you dirty little ape. There's *gotta* be. Only I don't know *how*. So you tell me."

Sacheverell whimpered. "I don't *know*, George. I don't *know*."

The man scowled, then grinned slyly. "That's what *you* say. I'm not so sure. You think I don't know that if They found out, They'd take you away from me? Sure. A million bucks . . . How come I'm being followed, if They don't know? First a guy with a beard, then a kid in a red snow suit. *I* seen them together. Listen, you frigging little jocko, you better *think*, I'm telling you—you better think hard!" He poked again with his stiff and dirty finger. And again. "I always knew, see, I always *knew* that there was a million bucks waiting for me somewhere, if I only kept my eyes open. What the Hell is a guy like me doing unloading crates in the fruit market, when I got plans for a million? And then—" His voice sank

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and his eyes narrowed. "—this Professor Whitman come along and put up at the Eagle Hotel. I caught his act in the sticks once, I been around. *First* I thought he was practicing ventriloquism, *then* I found out about *you*—*you* was the other voice in his room! And that's when I—"

Abruptly he stopped. The outside door opened with a rusty squeal and footfalls sounded in the hall. Someone knocked. Someone tried the knob. Someone said, "Sacheverell? Sacheverell?" and George clamped his hairy, filthy hand over the captive's mouth. Sacheverell jerked and twitched and rolled his eyes. The voice made a disappointed noise, the footfalls moved uncertainly, started to retreat. And then Sacheverell kicked out at George's crotch. The man grunted, cursed, lost his grip—

"Help!" Sacheverell cried. *"Help! Help! Save me!"*

Fists beat on the door, the glass in the back window crashed and fell to the floor, a weasened old-man's face peered through the opening, withdrew. George ran to the door, then turned to chase Sacheverell, who fled, shrieking hysterically. A tiny figure in a red snow-suit squeezed through the bars of the back window and ran to pull the bolt on the door. Someone in boots and a plaid jacket and a woolen watch-cap burst in, melting snow glittering on a big black beard.

"Save me!" Sacheverell screamed, dashing from side to side. "He attacked Professor Whitman and knocked him down *and he didn't get up again*—"

George stooped, picking up the chair, but the red snow-suit got between his legs and he stumbled. The chair was jerked from his hands, he came up with his fists clenched and the bearded person struck down with the chair. It caught him across the bridge of the nose with a crunching noise, he fell, turned over, stayed down. Silence.

Sacheverell hiccupped. Then he said, "Why are you wearing *men's* clothing, Princess Zaga?"

"A bearded man attracts quite enough attention, thank you," the Princess said, disengaging the chain. "No need to advertise . . . Let's get out of here." She picked him up and the three of them went out into the black, deserted street, boarded-shut windows staring blindly. The snow fell thickly, drifting into the ravaged hall and into the room where George's blood, in a small pool, had already begun to freeze.

"There's our car, Sacheverell," said the man in the red snow suit, thrusting a cigar into his child-size, jaded old face. "What a time —"

"I assume you are still with the carnival, General Pinkey?"

"No, kiddy. The new owners wouldn't recognize the union, so

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we quit and retired on Social Security in Sarasota. You'll like it there. Not that the unions are much better, mind you: Bismarkian devices to dissuade the working classes from industrial government on a truly Marxian, Socialist-Labor basis. We got a television set, kiddy."

"And look who's waiting for you—" Princess Zaga opened the station wagon and handed Sacheverell inside. There, in the back seat, was the hugest, the vastest, the fattest woman in the world.

"Princess Opal!" Sacheverell cried, leaping into her arms—and was buried in the wide expanse of her bosom and bathed in her warm Gothick tears. She called him her Precious and her Little Boy and her very own Peter Pan.

"It was Madame Opal who planned this all," Princess Zaga remarked, starting the car and driving off. General Pinkey lit his cigar and opened a copy of *The Weekly People.*

"Yes, I did, yes, I did," Mme. Opal murmured, kissing and hugging Sacheverell. "Oh, how neglected you are! Oh, how thin! We'll have a tea-party, just like we used to, the very best doll dishes; we'll see you eat nice and we'll wash you and comb you and put ribbons around your neck."

Sacheverell began to weep. "Oh, it was *awful* with George," he said.

"Never mind, never mind, he didn't know any better," Mme. Opal said, soothingly.

"The Hell he didn't!" snapped Princess Zaga.

"Predatory capitalism," General Pinkey began.

"Never mind, never mind, forget about it, darling, it was only a bad dream . . ."

Sacheverell dried his tears on Mme. Opal's enormous spangled-velvet bosom. "George was very *mean* to me," he said. "He treated me *very* mean. But worst of all, you know, Madame Opal, he *lied* to me—he lied to me all the time, and I almost believed him—that was the most horrible part of all: I almost believed that I was a monkey."

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The phrase which intitules Mr. Sharkey's story does not come, we are somewhat reliably informed, from the works of Darwin—as is popularly believed—but from those of his not-quite-colleague, Alfred Wallace, the eminent Malayologist; Darwin's own phrase being "natural selection". Be that as it may. Is there no reality to dreams? Is there no unreality to the waking state? The replies of Darwin and Wallace to these perennial questions, we do not find conveniently to hand, alas. But of one thing, however, we are quite sure. Neither gentleman ever lived in Greenwich Village nor patronized one of those chiropractors of the spirit known as psychoanalysts.

SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST

by Jack Sharkey

DR. MOONSTAR WROTE SWIFTly, in big black graphite letters, on the thick, pulpy yellow paper of his pad. Beyond the uppermost edge of the pad, on a pink cloud only slightly smaller than the one on which his desk and chair floated, the youth on the padded leatherette couch stared wearily upward into the blue-black void that lay in all directions about the two clouds; and talked in a toneless, listless voice, spewing out the details which Moonstar was adding in pertinent abridged form to the not-inconsiderable file of notes already garnered from the patient's discourses.

"And then," Moonstar prompted, when the man's voice failed him a moment, "you had this fight, in your dream, and slammed out of the apartment?"

"Yes, that's right," said Greg Norton, the man on the couch. "Adela was furious, of course. She wanted to rip up all my paintings, smash the tubes of color, snap the brushes in two. I knew she wouldn't, after I'd gone, of course. But if I stayed, she might get just mad enough. So I went out."

"And this Village you speak of, the one in which your dream seems always to take place, Mr. Norton —Was it the same as always, when you got outside?"

"The same—Insofar as the Village is ever the same," said Greg. "A few new characters with shiny

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new crops of black whiskers, an addition or subtraction among the paintings in the square. Like that. But the buildings, the streets . . . All the same."

"Still in—" The psychiatrist consulted his notes for the name. "Still in New York, this fantastic island city you described last week?"

"So far as I know. The locale didn't enter into my conversations with my confreres last night."

"I see," said Moonstar. Then, as he noted this data on the pad, a sharp reddish glimmer of light off to his left made him turn his head that way. Off in the utterly featureless darkness of the void, a globular shape was swimming into pallid crimson existence. Moonstar sighed, removed his pincenez, and, with closed eyes, began to massage the bridge of his nose. "That, I think, will be all for today, Mr. Norton," he said.

Greg sat up and let his legs dangle from the edge of the couch, over the wispy pink rim of cloud that lay between his bare feet and the void. "Same time tomorrow?" he asked, scratching at his waistline where the tight drawstring of his pajama bottoms was impeding circulation.

"Same time," Moonstar nodded. "Be sure to check on the locale of the Village if the dream returns."

"I will," Greg promised, and sprang nimbly from the edge of the couch. Pale tendrils of cloud brushed the soles of his feet, and then he was tumbling happily downward into blue-black nothingness, the twin clouds pale cottony dots already, high above him. Greg tumbled head over heels in comfortable slow motion, yawning wearily and staring in mild interest at the brightening crimson globe far off in the distance. The dull red surface was becoming a glare, now, and it hurt his eyes to look at it. He shut them tight, and tried to ignore the blinding yellows that the glaring orb left upon his inner lids. He snorted, twisted his body in the opposite direction, and bumped into a hand. He opened his eyes to see a rumpled pillow, and the five blood-red fingernails of the hand that lay upon it. Sitting up in the bed, he saw Adela, her face puffy from too much sleep, lying somnolent beside him.

"Damn," he sighed, getting out of bed and stretching, amid the litter of paint-smeared rags that lay about the one-room apartment, with its high, sloping windows facing the all-important north light near the easel and its half-completed canvas. "Always the same dream. I wonder if this Village I seem to be in is still on that silly island?"

He looked through the lower part of the window, and could see a spider-web of bridge cables in the distant haze of early morning, still spanning that river he dreamt of

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on the southernish tip of the island. "Still here, I bet," he sighed, plugging in the single-unit electric range on which the coffeepot rested. While waiting out the time it would take to begin perking, Greg shucked off his pajamas, slipped into a heavy blue woolen bathrobe, and went out into the hall to get first crack at the bathroom he and Adela shared with the other loft on the top floor. There was, as happened about two dreams a week, no hot water, but Greg showered anyhow, figuring that the itchy, non-washed feeling *felt* real, even though he knew it to be a simple product of his slumbering mind. "A dream of soap," he quoted Dr. Moonstar as he fought his body's urge to leap from beneath the freezing cold spray, "can be safely counteractive to a dream of dried perspiration."

Shuddering when he finally toweled himself, Greg fought an impulse to sneeze. "It might waken me, and then I'd have to face Moonstar with hardly any detail whatsoever."

Back in his room, he saw that Adela was sitting up in bed, regarding him steadily with tired grey eyes. "How's cloudland?" she said, sardonically. Greg regretted ever telling her she was a figment of his dream of the Village, since her resentment felt quite real.

"Fine," he said noncommitally. "Dr. Moonstar thinks we're making splendid progress."

"And what," said Adela, tautly, "is today's assignment?"

"Finding out if we're still on—uh, whatsis . . . Manhattan Island," said Greg, turning off the coffee and pouring two cups. He brought Adela hers, and she took it without thanks, staying in the bed with the blankets tucked about her waist as she leaned against the headboard.

"*Whatsis!*" she muttered, and sipped the coffee. "It's been called Manhattan since Peter Minuit bought it, and Greg says, 'uh, whatsis'!" She stared at her husband, suddenly. "Or did you make up Peter Minuit, too?"

"I must have," he said, sitting beside her on the bed. "Otherwise, you and I couldn't discuss him."

Adela stared at him a long time, as if trying to say something. Then—and Greg sensed she was not saying what she'd been thinking about—she grunted a belated, "Thanks for the coffee."

"Sure," he said, sipping his own. After awhile, Adela got up, put her empty cup into the sink, and started for the bathroom. As she reached the door to the hall, Greg called after her, "There's no hot water."

Adela, annoyed, stopped with her hand on the knob and looked back over her shoulder at him. "The least you could do," she said with bitter humor, "is dream some up for me."

"You know I can't do that, 'Del,"

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Greg complained. "Dr. Moonstar says that direct interference might upset the balance of my psyche, and—"

"*Moonstar!*" groaned Adela, shutting her eyes tight. "You'd think even his *name* would clue you in that—"

"That what?" asked Greg, when she hesitated.

"Never mind," said Adela. She went out into the hall, not closing the door, and after a few moments, Greg heard the shower running in the bathroom. He yawned, poured himself a second cup of coffee, then set it to cool on the narrow sill of the window while he dressed. When Adela returned, her face pinched and slightly blue, he was in his faded denim slacks, dark blue pullover, and wooden shower clogs, staring at the surface of his latest canvas.

By the time Adela was in her leotards, loafers and wraparound red skirt, Greg had made his decision, and had squirted the necessary colors onto his streaked palette. He painted swiftly, surely, smiling unconsciously as he squinted, knotted his brow, and stared critically at the work under creation. Adela took his now-empty cup from the windowsill, refilled it, and set it back in place, before coming around behind the easel and looking at the picture with him. "It's almost done," she remarked. "But the left hand still looks wrong."

Distracted, Greg stared at her, then at the canvas. "It *is* kind of misproportionate," he nodded, after a bit. "You mind posing again?"

"Do I ever?" asked his wife, getting up on the rough wooden platform fifteen feet from the easel, and striking the pose of the girl on the canvas.

"A little higher," Greg said, without thanking her.

Adela obliged, and Greg grunted when she had her hand in the correct elevation, then proceeded to paint like fury. When her arm grew tired, she came down from the platform and around the easel again. "Where's the polish?" she asked, studying the painting.

"It clashed with the shade of the skirt," said Greg, "so I painted the nails natural color."

"I liked the polish," said his wife. Greg shrugged, but kept on painting without replying. Adela, tiring of watching his brush leap over the canvas, studied her hand in the light from the window. "I could have sworn," she said, "that I *had* polish on my nails."

"Probably washed off in the shower," said Greg.

"Nail polish?" laughed Adela. "Not even in *hot* water."

Greg shrugged again. "So you were mistaken," he said. Then his mind returned to the moment he'd entered the dream, and had seen her hand on the pillow beside his head. "No," he said, "you're right." He set the brush down and stared

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at her, hard. "You *were* wearing polish this morning."

Adela looked at her nails again. "Well, I'm not now." Scowling suddenly, she nibbled at a just-noticed hangnail, and said, out of the side of her mouth, "Maybe that stand-up-and-walk-by-itself coffee you make affects the nails from the inside; you know, like taking gelatine."

"Uh-huh," nodded Greg. "Then again, maybe I've gone and interfered with the dream."

"The dream, the dream, the *dream!*" his wife moaned. "Are we *still* on that topic?"

"What if I could prove it to you?" said Greg, abruptly. "If my painting the color off your nails takes it off your nails outside the canvas—I should *be* able to show you."

"Greg—!" said Adela, irritation and anger twisting in her stomach like a ball of hot worms. "I'll take your word for it. Leave the painting alone. It's just fine."

"But," he said, disappointed, his brush hovering over the canvas, "Isn't there anything about yourself you'd like to see changed? A little fat off the hips, perhaps, or a shaplier pair of legs, a new hair length, color—"

"I like me the way I am!" Adela snapped. "*Just* the way I am! And so are *you* supposed to, or why did you marry me, anyhow! If you want to paint me differently, paint me with a fistful of *money,* why don't you!? That would be the change I'd relish!"

"Do you suppose I could?" asked Greg, intrigued by the thought. But Adela, with a snort of bitter anger, turned on her heel and rushed out of the loft.

Greg, left alone, stared at his color tubes, then selected viridian, ebon, and white and squirted a blob of each on his light wooden palette, carefully recapped the tubes, and stepped to the canvas once more. He would paint oblongs of white paper in Adela's fist, edge them delicately with green, then duplicate—in detail correlative to the manner of his handling of the rest of the portrait—the numerals and designs of high-denomination bills in black . . .

A stroke of white, and his hand stopped.

"I'm interfering with the dream," he told himself. "Dr. Moonstar might not approve. I should ask him— But I can't do that until I awaken, can I? Besides, this will give me interesting detail to add to my next analysis. So far, it's been nothing but everyday, boring, monotonous life in this Village I dreamed up."

So thinking, he proceeded to complete the sheaf of crisp bills in the grasp of the hand in the portrait. He chose fifties, as being easy for Adela to break in the stores of the neighborhood. Larger would have presented buying problems;

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smaller would have been cramped ambition.

By sunset, when his wife had not yet returned, Greg trotted down four flights to the darkening streets below to seek her out. Acquaintances who strolled the cooling sidewalks, or lounged in doorways, or sprawled on benches in the square were questioned casually but thoroughly. Yes, Adela had been seen that morning. Yes, she said she had come into money unexpectedly. Someone had seen her descending into the subway entrance at 14th Street, on the Uptown side. There the trail died. Greg went home to the loft with a slight headache.

He lay awake a long time, listening for her footfall on the stairs, but eventually his tired eyes drooped shut.

"So you assume she's moved uptown, and left you?" asked Moonstar, scribbling faithfully.

"What else could it be?" Greg sighed, his nervous fingers clutching at the edges of the couch. "I painted nearly three hundred dollars in her hands. She never had so much at once before. Perhaps it went to her head."

"Interesting," said Moonstar. "Your dream is starting to get someplace, now. The thing to do, of course, is to have a showdown with the new man in her life."

Greg turned his face toward the doctor, then sat up. "What makes you think there's a new man?"

Moonstar shrugged gently. "She didn't return to the old one, did she?" He smiled indulgently, and gestured for Greg to recline once more. "It's common enough in dreams of blighted love. Women never run *from* something; only *to* something."

"I'm going back there!" said Greg, sliding forward to the lip of the couch. "I've got to find her."

"It's *only* a dream—" began Moonstar, but Greg was already plunging from view into the black void between the clouds.

He sat up with a start in bed, threw aside the light coverlet, and found his clothes and shoes without turning on the light. In the small bathroom down the hall, he dashed water in his face, scrubbed it dry with a rough towel, then started for the stairs. And stopped on the top landing.

"There's a million places she could be," he told himself. "I need a clue. Some hint as to her whereabouts—The picture!"

Greg rushed back into the loft and snapped on the light. The canvas faced the darkened window, and was invisibly grey with the room's single bulb behind it. Greg spun it toward the light, nearly topping the easel, and then stood and stared in numb shock at the portrait of his wife.

The hand that had held the money was empty. And Adela, no longer standing, lay in a pool of her own blood. There were bruises

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about her face and bare shoulders that revealed the brutality of whoever had robbed her. Greg thought of the police, then dismissed the thought. He had only a portrait to show them. A portrait that might send him to the electric chair if Adela were found as he'd apparently painted her. His dream must not become a burning nightmare.

Swiftly, Greg grabbed for his palette and brushes and paints, squinting in the poor light as he did what he had to do. An hour later, it was done.

Leotards and wraparound skirt were painted away. In their place, the body of Adela Norton was clad in a rich blue evening gown and mink stole. The outermost joint of each finger was painted away, leaving only raw red stumps. The body ended in a ragged rise of throat; the head had been painted away completely.

"Now no one will know who she is," Greg gasped in triumph. "Rich clothing will keep the inquiries clear of the Village; no fingerprints, no face, will keep her from ever being connected with me. I'm safe. Safe."

He turned, trembling with fatigue, and poured himself a cold cup of coffee from the pot made that morning. He drank it in three gulps, felt a bit steadier, and turned to look upon his handiwork again. The desolate areaway in which the body had lain remained, as did much of the blood. But Adela was no longer in the portrait.

"The police—" Greg said aloud. The uncertainty in his own tone trouble him. "They must have found her— Taken the body to the morgue. That's all."

All at once, he wanted badly to talk to Dr. Moonstar. He turned and rushed for the bed. On the floor, his foot struck something and he fell headlong, dashing his head against the wall. Dazed, he sat up to see what had tripped him.

On the floor not far from the foot of the easel lay the turpentined rag with which he had cleared the damning details from the portrait. There was a roundish lump under it, the thing over which he had stumbled. He knew what it was, but he lifted the rag anyhow, and stared at Adela's missing head, lying on ten gory fingertips.

When he finally heard the heavy footsteps on the stairs to the loft, he knew whose they were, and what she was coming back for. "Moonstar!" he screamed, scrambling toward the bed. "Moonstar, wake me up! The dream's a nightmare! Wake me up!"

Like a child, he huddled under the bedclothes with the pillow shielding his face. He heard the door to the room open, heard the footsteps moving across the floor toward the turpentined rag and its grisly secret.

"Moonstar!" he whimpered, and

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felt his consciousness whirling in the first numb dazzle of a dead faint.

Greg sat up on the couch, shuddering with relief. "Doctor, I've just had the worst—" he began, then stopped as he turned his head. Moonstar's cloud was empty of tenancy. The desk and pad were there, but Moonstar was not. A sign on the desk read, simply, "Doctor is on vacation."

Greg sat on the edge of the couch, staring at the sign. He knew he could sit there only so long before fatigue would make him sleep again. And when he slept—

Frantically, he twisted his body, flung himself face downward upon the couch, and clung to it like a drifting log in a hostile sea. "I won't sleep!" he told himself. "I won't go back and finish that dream."

His perch rocked slightly, nauseatingly, and Greg lifted his head to see what was happening. The crimson orb was starting to appear in the void again. The cottony tendrils of cloud were dissolving in the rays that flared from the orb. Greg, cold with sweat, his teeth gritted and bared in terror, hung on gamely, refusing to leave his last sanctuary. The orb grew redder, brighter, warmer. The cloud faded, was gone.

Greg, still clinging doggedly to the couch, dropped giddily into the black void, too frightened to voice the scream of despair that welled up in his chest. He fell faster by the instant, and a searing wind was trying to tear his grip free of the couch. "I won't leave, I won't let go!" he sobbed, and buried his face in the resilient surface of the couch, holding it there tightly, frantically.

"How's it look?" asked the police lieutenant.

"Not good," said the young interne, taking his stethoscope from the chest of the pale, gasping young man in the hurtling ambulance. "A real screwball case. His wife came up to the clinic this morning, asked if one of the doctors could prescribe something for her husband's nerves; said he was getting pretty rocky lately. I only work there half a day today, so I said I'd come home with her at noon and look him over. I'm not sure we got there in time, at all. Found him lying unconscious in bed, his arms smothering a pillow against his face. And those paintings—!"

The lieutenant nodded. "I saw them. His wife, with a fistful of money, his wife lying dead, some dame's body in a mink lying the same way, and then a blood areaway. He must be real sick."

"His wife said he thought life was a dream; his dream. That anything he painted came true. That the city of New York, the Village, the whole creation, was all in his

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imagination." The interne shuddered. "Poor stupid nut!" He looked at the figure on the stretcher, and his expression changed. He grabbed the man's wrist in his strong fingers.

"What is it?" asked the lieutenant, though some swifter psychic part of his mind already knew.

The interne sighed, sat back, and then lifted the sheet over the face of the corpse. "You may as well tell Donnelly to turn off the siren," he said to the lieutenant. "There's no rush, now."

The cop nodded, and leaned toward the window connecting with the driver's seat. And just before he reached it, the siren stopped. And then the ambulance stopped. And the sounds of the big city stopped.

The lieutenant turned a white face to the interne.

"Say," he said, with a nervous laugh, "you don't think—"

He was talking to empty air. The interne was no longer there to think anything.

Outside the stalled ambulance, the first skyscraper began to topple.

THE PRODIGALS

Never dream the stars in future years
Will know our fleets flung up like shining spears,
Or care or comprehend
What strange caravan has passed
To what uncertain end.

Never doubt when every sun is old
And all our ardent blood grown thin and cold
For no new worlds to roam,
Having loved us to the last,
Earth will call us home.

—JEAN BRIDGE

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FORGET IT!

by Isaac Asimov

THE OTHER DAY I WAS LOOKING THROUGH a new textbook on biology, "Biological Science: An Inquiry Into Life," written by a number of contributing authors and published by Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc. in 1963. I found it fascinating.

Unfortunately, though, I read the "Foreword" first (yes, I'm one of *that* kind) and was instantly plunged into the deepest gloom. Let me quote from the first two paragraphs:

"With each new generation our fund of scientific knowledge increases fivefold. . . . At the current rate of scientific advance, there is about four times as much significant biological knowledge today as in 1930, and about sixteen times as much as in 1900. By the year 2000, at this rate of increase, there will be a hundred times as much biology to 'cover' in the introductory course as at the beginning of the century."

Imagine how this affects me. I am a professional "keeper-upper" with science and in my more manic, ebullient and carefree moments, I even think I succeed fairly well.

Then I read something like the above quoted passage and the world falls about my ears. I *don't* keep up with science. Worse, I *can't* keep up with it. Still worse, I'm falling farther behind every day.

And finally, when I'm all through sorrowing for myself (and this takes a long time, for I believe in being careful and thorough-going in my self-pity) I devote a few moments to worrying about the world generally. What is going to become of Homo sapiens? We're going to smarten ourselves to death. After a while, we will all die of pernicious education, with our brain cells crammed to indigestion with facts and concepts, and with blasts of information exploding out of our ears.

But then, as luck would have it, the very day after I read the Foreword to "Biological Science" I came across an old, old book entitled "Pike's Arithmetic." At least that is the name on the spine. On the title page, it spreads itself a bit better for in those days, titles were *titles*. It goes "A New and Complete System of Arithmetic Composed for the Use of the

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Citizens of the United States" by Nicolas Pike, A. M. It was first published in 1785, but the copy I have is only the "Second Edition, Enlarged," published in 1797.

It is a large book of over 500 pages, crammed full of small print and with no relief whatever in the way of illustrations or diagrams. It is a solid slab of arithmetic except for small sections at the very end that introduce algebra and geometry.

I was amazed. I have two children in grade school (and once I was in grade school myself) and I know what arithmetic books are like these days. They are nowhere near as large. They can't posibly even have one-fifth the wordage of Pike.

Can it be that we are leaving anything out?

So I went through Pike and, you know, we *are* leaving something out. And there's nothing wrong with that. The trouble is we're not leaving *enough* out.

On page 19, for instance, Pike devotes half a page to a listing of numbers as expressed in Roman numerals, extending it upward to five hundred thousand. (I challenge any Gentle Reader to tell me how to express five hundred thousand in Roman numerals according to Pike's system.)

Now Arabic numerals reached Europe in the high Middle Ages, and once they came on the scene the Roman numerals were completely outmoded. They lost all possible use, so infinitely superior was the new Arabic notation. Until then, who knows how many reams of paper were required to explain methods for calculating with Roman numerals. Afterwards the same calculations could be performed with a hundredth of the explanation. No knowledge was lost—only inefficient rules.

And yet five hundred years after the deserved death of the Roman numerals, Pike still included them and expected his readers to be able to translate them into Arabic numerals and vice versa even though he gave no instructions for how to manipulate them. In fact, nearly two hundred years after Pike, the Roman numerals are still being taught. My little daughter is learning them now.

But why? Where's the need? To be sure, you will find Roman numerals on cornerstones and gravestones, on clock-faces and on some public buildings and documents, but it isn't used for any need at all. It is used for show, for status, for antique flavor, for a craving for some kind of phoney classicism.

I dare say there are some sentimental fellows who feel that knowledge of the Roman numerals is a kind of gateway to history and culture; that scrapping them would be like knocking over what is left of the

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Parthenon, but I have no patience with such mawkishness. We might as well suggest that everyone who learns to drive a car be required to spend some time at the wheel of a Model T Ford so he could get the flavor of early car-dom.

Roman numerals? Forget it!—And make room instead for new and valuable material.

But do we dare forget things? Why not? We've forgotten much; more than you imagine. Our troubles stem not from the fact that we've forgotten; but that we remember too well; we don't forget enough.

A great deal of Pyke's book consists of material we have imperfectly forgotten. That is why the modern arithmetic book is shorter than Pike. And if we could but perfectly forget, the modern arithmetic book could grow still shorter.

For instance, Pike devotes many pages to tables; presumably important tables that he thought the reader ought to be familiar with. His fifth table is labelled "cloth measure."

Did you know that 2¼ inches make a "nail?" Well, they do. And 16 nails make a yard; while 12 nails make an ell.

No, wait a while. Those 12 nails (27 inches) make a *Flemish* ell. It takes 20 nails (45 inches) to make an English ell, and 24 nails (54 inches) to make a French ell. Then, 16 nails plus 1⅕ inches (37⅕ inches) make a Scotch ell.

Now if you're going to be in the business world and import and export cloth, you're going to have to know all those ells—unless you can figure some way of getting the ell out of business.

Furthermore, almost every piece of goods is measured in its own units. You speak of a firkin of butter, a punch of prunes, a fother of lead, a stone of butcher's meat and so on. Each of these quantities weighs a certain number of pounds (avoirdupois pounds, but there are also troy pounds and apothecary pounds and so on) and Pike carefully gives all the equivalents.

Do you want to measure distances? Well, how about this: 7 92/100 inches make 1 link; 25 links make 1 pole; 4 poles make 1 chain; 10 chains make 1 furlong; and 8 furlongs make 1 mile.

Or, do you want to measure ale or beer—a very common line of work in Colonial times. You have to know the language, of course. Here it is: 2 pints make a quart and 4 quarts make a gallon. Well, we still know that much anyway.

In Colonial times, however, a mere gallon of beer or ale was but a starter. That was for infants. One had to know how to speak of man-sized quantities. Well, 8 gallons make a firkin—that is, it makes "a

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firkin of ale in London." It takes, however, 9 gallons to make a "firkin of beer in London." The intermediate quantity, 8½ gallons, is marked down as a "firkin of ale or beer"—presumably outside of the environs of London where the provincial citizens were less finicky in distinguishing between the two.

But we go on: 2 firkins (I suppose the intermediate kind, but I'm not sure) make a kilderkin and 2 kilderkins make a barrel. Then 1½ barrels make 1 hogshead; 2 barrels make a puncheon; and 3 barrels make a butt.

Have you got all that straight?

But let's try dry measure in case your appetite has been sharpened for something still better.

Here, 2 pints make a quart and 2 quarts make a pottle. (No, not bottle, *pottle*. Don't tell me you've never heard of a pottle!) But let's proceed.

Next, 2 pottles make a gallon, 2 gallons make a peck and 4 pecks make a bushel. (Long breath now.) Then 2 bushels make a strike, 2 strikes make a coom, 2 cooms make a quarter, 4 quarters make a chaldron (though in the demanding city of London, it takes 4½ quarters to make a chaldron). Finally, 5 quarters make a wey and 2 weys make a last.

I'm not making this up. I'm copying it right out of Pike, page 48.

Were people who were studying arithmetic in 1797 expected to memorize all this? Apparently, yes, because Pike spends a lot of time on compound addition. That's right, *compound* addition.

You see, the addition you consider addition, is just "simple addition." Compound addition is something stronger and I will now explain it to you.

Suppose you have 15 apples, your friend has 17 apples and a passing stranger has 19 apples and you decide to make a pile of them. Having done so, you wonder how many you have altogether. Preferring not to count, you draw upon your college education and prepare to add $15 + 17 + 19$. You begin with the units column and find that $5 + 7 + 9 = 21$. You therefore divide 21 by 10 and find the quotient is 2 plus a remainder of 1, so you put down the remainder, 1, and carry the quotient 2 into the tens col——

I seem to hear loud yells from the audience. "What is all this?" comes the fevered demand. "Where does this 'divide by 10' jazz come from?"

Ah, Gentle Readers, but this is exactly what you do whenever you add. It is only that the kindly souls who devised our Arabic system of numeration based it on the number 10 in such a way that when any

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two-digit number is divided by 10, the first digit represents the quotient and the second the remainder.

For that reason, having the quotient and remainder in our hands without dividing, we can add automatically. If the units column adds up to 21, we put down 1 and carry 2; if it had added up to 57, we would have put down 7 and carried 5, and so on.

The only reason this works mind you is that in adding a set of figures, each column of digits (starting from the right and working leftward) represents a value ten times as great as the column before. The rightmost column is units, the one to its left is tens, and so on.

It is this combination of a number-system based on ten and a value ratio from column to column of ten that makes addition very simple. It is for this reason that it is, as Pike calls it "simple addition."

Now suppose you have 1 dozen and 8 apples, your friend has 1 dozen and 10 apples and a passing stranger has 1 dozen and 9 apples. Make a pile of those and add them as follows:

1 dozen	8 units
1 dozen	10 units
1 dozen	9 units

Since $8 + 10 + 9 = 27$, do we put down 7 and carry 2? Not at all! The ratio of the "dozens" column to the "units" column is not 10 but 12, since there are 12 units to a dozen. And since the number system we are using is based on 10 and not on 12, we can no longer let the digits do our thinking for us. We have to go long way round.

If $8 + 10 + 9 = 27$, we must divide that sum by the ratio of the value of the columns; in this case, 12. We find that 27 divided by 12 gives a quotient of 2 plus a remainder of 3, so we put down 3 and carry 2. In the dozens column we get $1 + 1 + 1 + 2 = 5$. Our total therefore is 5 dozen and 3 apples.

Whenever a ratio of other than 10 is used so that you have to make actual divisions in adding, you have "compound addition." You must indulge in compound addition if you try to add 5 pounds 12 ounces and 6 pounds 8 ounces, for there are 16 ounces to a pound. You are stuck again, if you add 3 yards 2 feet 6 inches to 1 yard 2 feet 8 inches, for there are 12 inches to a foot, and 3 feet to a yard.

You do the former; I'll do the latter. First, 6 inches and 8 inches are 14 inches. Divide 14 by 12, getting 1 and a remainder of 2, so you put down 2 and carry 1. As for the feet $2 + 2 + 1 = 5$. Divide 5 by 3 and get 1 and a remainder of 2, put down 2 and carry 1. In the yards, you have $3 + 1 + 1 = 5$. Your answer, then, is 5 yards 2 feet 2 inches.

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Now why on earth should our unit-ratios vary all over the lot, when our number system is so firmly based on 10? There are many reasons (valid in their time) for the use of odd ratios like 2, 3, 4, 8, 12, 16, and 20, but surely we are now advanced and sophisticated enough to use 10 as the exclusive (or nearly exclusive) ratio. If we could do so, we could with such pleasure forget about compound addition,—and compound subtraction, compound multiplication, compound division, too. (They also exist, of course.)

To be sure, there are times when nature makes the universal ten impossible. In measuring time, the day and the year have their lengths fixed for us by astronomical conditions and neither unit of time can be abandoned. I once suggested a way of rationalizing time (ABOUT TIME, F & SF, April 1960) but I doubt that any such rationalization will ever be accepted. Compound addition and the rest will have to be retained for such special cases, alas.

But who in blazes says we must measure things in firkins and pottles and Flemish ells? These are purely man-made measurements and we must remember (to paraphase an important Personage of old) that measures were made for man and not man for measures.

It so happens that there is a system of measurement based exclusively on ten in this world. It is called the metric system (see PRE-FIXING IT UP, F & SF, November 1962) and it is used all over the civilized world except for certain English-speaking nations such as the United States and Great Britain.

By not adopting the metric system, we waste our time for we gain nothing, not one thing, by learning our own measurements. The loss in time (which is expensive indeed) is balanced by not one thing I can imagine.

There are those, of course, who object to violating our long-used cherished measures. They have given up cooms and chaldrons but imagine there is something about inches and feet and pints and quarts and pecks and bushels that is "simpler" or "more natural" than meters and liters.

There may even be people who find something dangerously foreign and radical (oh, for that vanished word of opprobrium, "Jacobin") in the metric system.—Yet it was the United States that led the way.

In 1786, ten years before the wicked French revolutionaries designed the metric system, Thomas Jefferson (a notorious Jacobin) saw a suggestion of his adopted by the infant United States. The nation established a decimal currency.

What we had been using was British currency and that is a fearsome

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and wonderful thing. Just to point out how preposterous it is, let me say that the British people who, over the centuries, have, with monumental patience, taught themselves to endure anything at all provided it was "traditional"—are now sick and tired of their currency and are debating converting it to the decimal system. (They can't agree on the exact details of the change.)

But consider the British currency as it is. To begin with, and I *hope* I have it straight, 4 farthings make 1 penny; 12 pennies make 1 shilling, and 20 shillings make 1 pound. In addition, there is a virtual farrago of ha'pennies and thruppences and sixpences and crowns and half-crowns and florins and guineas and heaven knows what other devices with which to cripple the mental development of the British schoolchild and line the pockets of British tradesmen whenever tourists come to call and stare helplessly at the coins.

Needless to say, Pike gives careful instruction on how to manipulate pounds, shillings and pence; and very special instructions they are. Try dividing 5 pounds, 13 shillings, 7 pence by 3. Quick now!

In the United States, the money system, as originally established, is as follows: 10 mills make 1 cent; 10 cents make 1 dime; 10 dimes make 1 dollar; 10 dollars make 1 eagle. Actually, modern Americans, in their calculations, stick to dollars and cents only.

The result? American money can be expressed in decimal form and can be treated as can any other decimals. An American child who has learned decimals need only be taught to recognize the dollar sign and he is all set. In the time that he does that a British child has barely mastered the fact that thruppence ha'penny equals 14 farthings.

What a pity that when, ten years later, the metric system came into being, our original anti-British, pro-French feelings had not lasted just long enough to allow us to adopt it. Had we done so, we would have been so happy to forget our foolish pecks and ounces. Just as we are now happy to have forgotten our pence and shillings. After all would you like to go back to British currency in preference to our own?

What I would like to see is one form of money do for all the world. Everywhere. Why not?

I appreciate the fact that I may be accused because of this of wanting to pour humanity into a mold, and of being a conformist. Of course, I am not a conformist (Heavens!). I have no objection to local customs and local dialects and local dietaries and local views on sex. In fact, I insist on them for I constitute a locality all by myself. I just don't want provincialisms that were well enough in their time but that interfere with human well-being in a world which is 90 minutes in circumference.

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If you think provincialism is cute and gives humanity color and charm, let me quote to you once more from Pike.

"Federal Money" (dollars and cents) had been introduced eleven years before Pike's second edition and he gives the exact wording of the law that established it and discusses it in detail—under the decimal system and not under compound addition.

Naturally since other systems than the Federal were still in use, rules had to be formulated and given for converting (or "reducing") one system to another. Here is the list. I won't give you the actual rules; just the list of reductions that were necessary, exactly as he lists them:

I. To reduce New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut and Virginia currency:

1. To Federal Money
2. To New York and North Carolina currency
3. To Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware and Maryland currency
4. To South Carolina and Georgia currency
5. To English money
6. To Irish money
7. To Canada and Nova Scotia currency
8. To Livres Tournois (French money)
9. To Spanish milled dollars.

II. To reduce Federal Money to New England and Virginia currency.

III. To reduce New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware and Maryland currency:

1. To New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut and Virginia currency
2. To New York and—

Oh, the heck with it. You get the idea.

Can any one possibly be sorry that all that cute provincial flavor has vanished? Are you sorry that every time you travel out of state, you don't have to throw yourself into fits of arithmetical discomfort whenever you want to make a purchase? Or into similar fits every time someone from another state invades yours and tries to dicker with you? What a pleasure to have forgotten all that.

Then tell me what's so wonderful about having fifty sets of marriage and divorce laws?

In 1752, Great Britain and her colonies (some two centuries later than Catholic Europe) abandoned the Julian Calendar and adopted the astronomically more correct Gregorian calendar. Nearly half a cen-

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tury later, Pike was still giving rules for solving complex calendar-based problems for the Julian calendar as well as for the Gregorian. Isn't it nice to have forgotten the Julian calendar?

Wouldn't it be nice if we could forget most of calendrical complications by adopting a rational calendar that would tie the day of the month firmly to the day of the week and have a single three-month calendar serve as a perpetual one, repeating itself over and over every three months. There is a World Calendar proposed which would do just this. It would enable us to do a lot of useful forgetting.

I would like to see the English language come into world-wide use. Not necessarily as the only language or even as the major language. It would just be nice if everyone—whatever his own language was—could also speak English fluently. It would help in communications and perhaps, eventually, everyone would just choose to speak English.

That would save a lot of room for other things.

Why English? Well, for one thing more people speak English as either first or second language than any other language on Earth, so we have a headstart. Secondly far more science is reported in English than in any other language and it is comunication in science that is critical today and will be even more critical tomorrow.

To be sure, we ought to make it as easy as possible for people to speak English, which means we should rationalize its spelling and grammar.

English, as it is spelled today, is almost a set of Chinese idiograms. No one can be sure how a word is pronounced by looking at the letters that make it up. How do you pronounce: rough, through, though, cough, hiccough, and lough; and why is it so terribly necessary to spell all those sounds with the mad letter combination "ough."

It looks funny, perhaps, to spell the words ruff, throo, thoh, cawf, hiccup, and lokh; but we already write hiccup and it doesn't look funny. We spell colour, color, and centre, center and shew, show and grey, gray. The result looks funny to a Britisher but we are used to it. We can get used to the rest, too, and save a lot of wear and tear on the brain. We would all become more intelligent, if intelligence is measured by proficiency at spelling, and we'll not have lost one thing.

And grammar? Who needs the eternal hair-splitting arguments about "shall" and "will" or "which" and "that." The uselessness of it can be demonstrated by the fact that virtually no one gets it straight anyway. Aside from losing valuable time, blunting a child's reasoning faculties, and instilling him or her with a ravening dislike for the English language, what do you gain?

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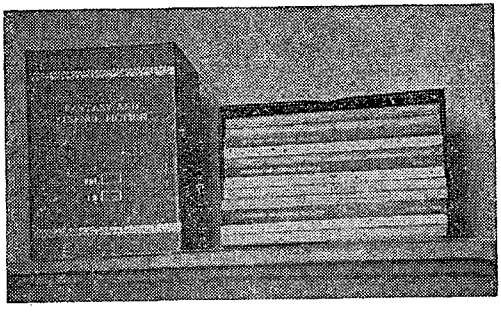
If there be some who think that such blurring of fine distinctions will ruin the language, I would like to point out that English, before the grammarians got hold of it, had managed to lose its gender and its declensions almost everywhere except among the pronouns. The fact that we have only one definite article (the) for all genders and cases and times instead of three as in French (le, la, les) or six, I think, as in German (der, die, das, dem, den, des) in no way blunts the English language which remains an admirably flexible instrument. We cherish our follies only because we are used to them and not because they are not really follies.

We must make room for expanding knowledge, or at least make as much room as possible. Surely it is as important to forget the old and useless, as it is to learn the new and important.

Forget it, I say, forget it more and more. *Forget it!*

But why am I getting so excited? No one is listening to a word I say.



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In Mr. Anthony Boucher's description of this story as "delightful and all-too-little-known," we fully concur. To us it epitomises, more than any other work, the wit and style and charm and terror of that rare and misfortunate genius, Oscar Fingall O'Flahertie Wills Wilde. Social chatter and natter as light and frothy as spun-sugar-cotton candy are succeeded by passages in which the crime of crimes is shrugged off as a trifling necessity; these give way in turn to genuine humor, followed by scenes of great beauty, and ever and anon there sparkle the famous epigrams of the famous fin de siècle *wit. Here then, is the story of young Lord Arthur Savile, the professional cheiromantist Septimus Podgers (of 103a West Moon Street), the lovely Miss Sybil Merton, fashionable Lady Windermere, conspiratorial Herr Winckelkopf—he of the explosive clocks and excellent* pâté*—dear old Lady Clem, and quite enough others to make you very glad to have read this rich if not altogether wholesome confection, indeed.*

Lord Arthur Savile's Crime

by Oscar Wilde

CHAPTER 1

IT WAS LADY WINDERMERE'S last reception before Easter, and Bentinck House was even more crowded than usual. Six cabinet ministers had come on from the Speaker's Levee in their stars and ribands, all the pretty women wore their smartest dresses, and at the end of the picture-gallery stood the Princess Sophia of Carlsruhe, a heavy Tartar-looking lady, with tiny black eyes and wonderful emeralds, talking bad French at the top of her voice and laughing immoderately at everything that was said to her. It was certainly a wonderful medley of people. Gorgeous peeresses chattered affably to violent Radicals, popular preachers brushed coat-tails with eminent sceptics, a perfect bevy of bishops kept following a stout prima donna from room to room, on the staircase stood several royal academi-

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cians, disguised as artists, and it was said that at one time the supper-room was absolutely crammed with geniuses. In fact, it was one of Lady Windermere's best nights, and the Princess stayed till nearly half-past eleven.

As soon as she had gone, Lady Windermere returned to the picture-gallery, where a celebrated political economist was solemnly explaining the scientific theory of music to an indignant virtuoso from Hungary, and began to talk to the Duchess of Paisley. She looked wonderfully beautiful with her grand ivory throat, her large, blue, forget-me-not eyes, and her heavy coils of golden hair. *Or pur* they were—not that pale straw colour that nowadays usurps the gracious name of gold, but such gold as is woven into sunbeams or hidden in strange amber—and they gave to her face something of the frame of a saint, with not a little of the fascination of a sinner. She was a curious psychological study. Early in life she had discovered the important truth that nothing looks so like innocence as an indiscretion, and by a series of reckless escapades, half of them quite harmless, she had acquired all the privileges of a personality. She had more than once changed her husband—indeed, Debrett credits her with three marriages—but as she had never changed her lover, the world had long ago ceased to talk scandal about her. She was now forty years of age, childless, and with that inordinate passion for pleasure which is the secret of remaining young.

Suddenly she looked eagerly round the room, and said, in her clear contralto voice, "Where is my cheiromantist?"

"Your what, Gladys?" exclaimed the duchess, giving an involuntary start.

"My cheiromantist, Duchess; I can't live without him at present."

"Dear Gladys! you are always so original," murmured the duchess, trying to remember what a cheiromantist really was, and hoping it was not the same as a cheiropodist.

"He comes to see my hand twice a week regularly," continued Lady Windermere, "and is most interesting about it."

"Good heavens!" said the duchess to herself, "he is a sort of cheiropodist after all. How very dreadful. I hope he is a foreigner at any rate. It wouldn't be quite so bad then."

"I must certainly introduce him to you."

"Introduce him!" cried the duchess; "you don't mean to say he is here?" and she began looking about for a small tortoise-shell fan and a very tattered lace shawl, so as to be ready to go at a moment's notice.

"Of course he is here; I would not dream of giving a party without him. He tells me I have a pure psychic hand, and that if my

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thumb had been the least little bit shorter, I should have been a confirmed pessimist and gone into a convent."

"Oh, I see!" said the duchess, feeling very much relieved; "he tells fortunes, I suppose?"

"And misfortunes, too," answered Lady Windermere; "any amount of them. Next year, for instance, I am in great danger, both by land and sea, so I am going to live in a balloon and draw up my dinner in a basket every evening. It is all written down on my little finger, or on the palm of my hand —I forget which."

"But surely that is tempting Providence, Gladys."

"My dear Duchess, surely Providence can resist temptation by this time. I think every one should have their hands told once a month, so as to know what not to do. Of course, one does it all the same, but it is so pleasant to be warned. Now, if some one doesn't go and fetch Mr. Podgers at once, I shall have to go myself."

"Let me go, Lady Windermere," said a tall, handsome young man who was standing by, listening to the conversation with an amused smile.

"Thanks so much, Lord Arthur; but I am afraid you wouldn't recognize him."

"If he is as wonderful as you say, Lady Windermere, I couldn't miss him. Tell me what he is like, and I'll bring him to you at once."

"Well, he is not a bit like a cheiromantist. I mean he is not mysterious; or esoteric, or romantic-looking. He is a little, stout man, with a funny bald head, and great gold-rimmed spectacles—something between a family doctor and a country attorney. I'm really very sorry, but it is not my fault. People are so annoying. All my pianists look exactly like poets, and all my poets look exactly like pianists; and I remember last season asking a most dreadful conspirator to dinner, a man who had blown up ever so many people, and always wore a coat of mail, and carried a dagger up his shirt-sleeve; and so you know that when he came he looked just like a nice old clergyman, and cracked jokes all the evening? Of course, he was very amusing and all that, but I was awfully disappointed; and when I asked him about the coat of mail, he only laughed and said it was far too cold to wear in England. Ah, here is Mr. Podgers! Now, Mr. Podgers, I want you to tell the Duchess of Paisley's hand. Duchess, you must take your glove off. No, not the left hand, the other."

"Dear Gladys, I really don't think it is quite right," said the duchess, feebly unbuttoning a rather soiled kid glove.

"Nothing interesting ever is," said Lady Windermere: *"on a fait le monde ainsi.* But I must introduce you. Duchess, this is Mr.

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Podgers, my pet cheiromantist. Mr. Podgers, this is the Duchess of Paisley, and if you say that she has a larger mountain of the moon than I have, I will never believe in you again."

"I am sure, Gladys, there is nothing of the kind in my hand," said the duchess gravely.

"Your Grace is quite right," said Mr. Podgers, glancing at the little fat hand with its short square fingers, "the mountain of the moon is not developed. The line of life, however, is excellent. Kindly bend the wrist. Thank you. Three distinct lines on the *rascette!* You will live to a great age, Duchess, and be extremely happy. Ambition —very moderate, line of intellect not exaggerated, line of heart—"

"Now, do be indiscreet, Mr. Podgers," cried Lady Windermere.

"Nothing would give me greater pleasure," said Mr. Podgers, bowing, "if the duchess ever had been, but I am sorry to say that I see great permanence of affection, combined with a strong sense of duty."

"Pray go on, Mr. Podgers," said the duchess, looking quite pleased.

"Economy is not the least of your Grace's virtues," continued Mr. Podgers, and Lady Windermere went off into fits of laughter.

"Economy is a very good thing," remarked the duchess complacently; "when I married Paisley, he had eleven castles and not a single house fit to live in."

"And now he has twelve houses and not a single castle," cried Lady Windermere.

"Well, my dear," said the Duchess, "I like—"

"Comfort," said Mr. Podgers, "and modern improvements, and hot water laid on in every bedroom. Your Grace is quite right. Comfort is the only thing our civilization can give us."

"You have told the duchess's character admirably, Mr. Podgers, and now you must tell Lady Flora's"; and in answer to a nod from the smiling hostess, a tall girl, with Sandy hair and high shoulder-blades, stepped awkwardly from behind the sofa and held out a long bony hand with spatulate fingers.

"Ah, a pianist! I see," said Mr. Podgers, "an excellent pianist, but perhaps hardly a musician. Very reserved, very honest, and with a great love of animals."

"Quite true!" exclaimed the duchess, turning to Lady Windermere, "absolutely true! Flora keeps two dozen collie dogs at Macloskie, and would turn our town house into a menagerie if her father would let her."

"Well, that is just what I do with my house every Thursday evening," cried Lady Windermere, laughing, "only I like lions better than collie dogs."

"Your one mistake, Lady Windermere," said Mr. Podgers, with a pompous bow.

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"If a woman can't make her mistakes charming, she is only a female," was the answer. "But you must read some more hands for us. Come, Sir Thomas, show Mr. Podgers yours"; and a genial-looking old gentleman, in a white waistcoat, came forward and held out a thick rugged hand with a very long third finger.

"An adventurous nature; four long voyages in the past, and one to come. Been shipwrecked three times. No, only twice, but in danger of a shipwreck your next journey. A strong Conservative, very punctual, and with a passion for collecting curiosities. Had a severe illness between the ages of sixteen and eighteen. Was left a fortune when about thirty. Great aversion to cats and Radicals."

"Extraordinary!" exclaimed Sir Thomas; "you must really tell my wife's hand, too."

"Your second wife's," said Mr. Podgers quietly, still keeping Sir Thomas's hand in his. "Your second wife's. I shall be charmed"; but Lady Marvel, a melancholy-looking woman, with brown hair and sentimental eyelashes, entirely declined to have her past or her future exposed; and nothing that Lady Windermere could do would induce Monsieur de Koloff, the Russian ambassador, even to take his gloves off. In fact, many people seemed afraid to face the odd little man with his stereotyped smile, his gold spectacles, and his bright beady eyes; and when he told poor Lady Fermor, right out before every one, that she did not care a bit for music, but was extremely fond of musicians, it was generally felt that cheiromancy was a most dangerous science, and one that ought not to be encouraged, except in a *tete-a-tete*.

Lord Arthur Savile, however, who did not know anything about Lady Fermor's unfortunate story, and who had been watching Mr. Podgers with a great deal of interest, was filled with an immense curiosity to have his own hand read, and feeling somewhat shy about putting himself forward, crossed over the room to where Lady Windermere was sitting and, with a charming blush, asked her if she thought Mr. Podgers would mind.

"Of course he won't mind," said Lady Windermere; "that is what he is here for. All my lions, Lord Arthur, are performing lions, and jumping through hoops whenever I ask them. But I must warn you beforehand that I shall tell Sybil everything. She is coming to lunch with me to-morrow to talk about bonnets, and if Mr. Podgers finds out that you have a bad temper, or a tendency to gout, or a wife living in Bayswater, I shall certainly let her know all about it."

Lord Arthur smiled and shook his head. "I am not afraid," he answered. "Sybil knows me as well as I know her."

"Ah! I am a little sorry to hear

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you say that. The proper basis for marriage is a mutual misunderstanding. No, I am not at all cynical, I have merely got experience, which, however, is very much the same thing. Mr. Podgers, Lord Arthur Savile is dying to have his hand read. Don't tell him that he is engaged to one of the most beautiful girls in London, because that appeared in the *Morning Post* a month ago."

"Dear Lady Windermere," cried the Marchioness of Jedburgh, "do let Mr. Podgers stay here a little longer. He has just told me I should go on the stage, and I am *so interested*."

"If he has told you that, Lady Jedburgh, I shall certainly take him away. Come over at once, Mr. Podgers, and read Lord Arthur's hand."

"Well," said Lady Jedburgh, making a little *moue* as she rose from the sofa, "if I am not to be allowed to go on the stage, I must be allowed to be part of the audience at any rate."

"Of course; we are all going to be part of the audience," said Lady Windermere; "and now, Mr. Podgers, be sure and tell us something nice. Lord Arthur is one of my special favourites."

But when Mr. Podgers saw Lord Arthur's hand, he grew curiously pale and said nothing. A shudder seemed to pass through him, and his great bushy eyebrows twitched convulsively, in an odd, irritating way they had when he was puzzled. Then some huge beads of perspiration broke out on his yellow forehead, like a poisonous dew, and his fat fingers grew cold and clammy.

Lord Arthur did not fail to notice these strange signs of agitation, and, for the first time in his life, he himself felt fear. His impulse was to rush from the room, but he restrained himself. It was better to know the worst, whatever it was, than to be left in this hideous uncertainty.

"I am waiting, Mr. Podgers," he said.

"We are all waiting," cried Lady Windermere, in her quick impatient manner, but the cheiromantist made no reply.

"I believe Arthur is going on the stage," said Lady Jedburgh, "and that, after your scolding, Mr. Podgers is afraid to tell him so."

Suddenly Mr. Podgers dropped Lord Arthur's right hand and seized hold of his left, bending down so low to examine it that the gold rims of his spectacles seemed almost to touch the palm. For a moment his face became a white mask of horror, but he soon recovered his *sangfroid* and, looking up at Lady Windermere, said with a forced smile, "It is the hand of a charming young man."

"Of course it is!" answered Lady Windermere, "but will he be a charming husband? That is what I want to know."

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"All charming young men are," said Mr. Podgers.

"I don't think a husband should be too fascinating," murmured Lady Jedburgh pensively; "it is so dangerous."

"My dear child, they never are too fascinating," cried Lady Windermere. "But what I want are details. Details are the only things that interest. What is going to happen to Lord Arthur?"

"Well, within the next few months Lord Arthur will go on a voyage——"

"Oh yes, his honeymoon, of course!"

"And lose a relative."

"Not his sister, I hope?" said Lady Jedburgh, in a piteous tone of voice.

"Certainly not his sister," answered Mr. Podgers, with a deprecating wave of his hand, "a distant relative merely."

"Well, I am dreadfully disappointed," said Lady Windermere. "I have absolutely nothing to tell Sybil tomorrow. No one cares about distant relatives nowadays. They went out of fashion years ago. However, I suppose she had better have a black silk by her; it always does for church, you know. And now let us go to supper. They are sure to have eaten everything up, but we may find some hot soup. Francois used to make excellent soup once but he is so agitated about politics at present that I never feel quite certain about him. I do wish General Boulanger would keep quiet. Duchess, I am sure you are tired?"

"Not at all, dear Gladys," answered the duchess, waddling towards the door. "I have enjoyed myself immensely, and the cheiropodist—I mean the cheiromantist—is most interesting. Flora, where can my tortoise-shell fan be? Oh, thank you, Sir Thomas, so much. And my lace shawl, Flora? Oh, thank you, Sir Thomas, very kind, I'm sure"; and the worthy creature finally managed to get downstairs without dropping her scent-bottle more than twice.

All this time Lord Arthur Savile had remained standing by the fireplace, with the same feeling of dread over him, the same sickening sense of coming evil. He smiled sadly at his sister as she swept past him on Lord Plymdale's arm, looking lovely in her pink brocade and pearls, and he hardly heard Lady Windermere when she called to him to follow her. He thought of Sybil Merton, and the idea that anything could come between them made his eyes dim with tears.

Looking at him, one would have said that Nemesis had stolen the shield of Pallas and shown him the Gorgon's head. He seemed turned to stone, and his face was like marble in its melancholy. He had lived the delicate and luxurious life of a young man of birth and fortune, a life exquisite in its

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freedom from sordid care, its beautiful boyish insouciance, and now for the first time he became conscious of the terrible mystery of destiny, of the awful meaning of doom.

How mad and monstrous it all seemed! Could it be that written on his hand, in characters that he could not read himself, but that another could decipher, was some fearful secret of sin, some blood-red sign of crime? Was there no escape possible? Were we no better than chessmen, moved by an unseen power, vessels the potter fashions at his fancy, for honour or for shame? His reason revolted against it, and yet he felt that some tragedy was hanging over him, and that he had been suddenly called upon to bear an intolerable burden. Actors are so fortunate. They can choose whether they will appear in tragedy or in comedy, whether they will suffer or make merry, laugh or shed tears. But in real life it is different. Most men and women are forced to perform parts for which they have no qualifications. Our Guildensterns play Hamlet for us, and our Hamlets have to jest like Prince Hal. The world is a stage, but the play is badly cast.

Suddenly Mr. Podgers entered the room. When he saw Lord Arthur, he started, and his coarse fat face became a sort of greenish-yellow colour. The two men's eyes met, and there was silence.

"The duchess has left one of her gloves here, Lord Arthur, and has asked me to bring it to her," said Mr. Podgers finally. "Ah, I see it on the sofa! Good evening."

"Mr. Podgers, I must insist on your giving me a straight-forward answer to a question I am going to put to you."

"Another time, Lord Arthur, but the duchess is anxious. I am afraid I must go."

"You shall not go. The duchess is in no hurry."

"Ladies should not be kept waiting, Lord Arthur," said Mr. Podgers, with his sickly smile. "The fair sex is apt to be impatient."

Lord Arthur's finely chiselled lips curled in petulant disdain. The poor duchess seemed to him of very little importance at that moment. He walked across the room to where Mr. Podgers was standing, and held his hand out.

"Tell me what you saw there," he said. "Tell me the truth. I must know it. I am not a child."

Mr. Podgers's eyes blinked behind his gold-rimmed spectacles, and he moved uneasily from one foot to the other, while his fingers played nervously with a flash watch-chain.

"What makes you think that I saw anything in your hand, Lord Arthur, more than I told you?"

"I know you did, and I insist on your telling me what it was. I will pay you. I will give you a cheque for a hundred pounds."

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The green eyes flashed for a moment, and then became dull again.

"Guineas?" said Mr. Podgers at last, in a low voice.

"Certainly. I will send you a cheque to-morrow. What is your club?"

"I have no club. That is to say, not just at present. My address is —but allow me to give you my card"; and producing a bit of gilt-edge pasteboard from his waistcoat pocket, Mr. Podgers handed it, with a low bow, to Lord Arthur, who read on it

Mr. SEPTIMUS R. PODGERS
Professional Cheiromantist
103a West Moon Street

"My hours are from ten to four," murmured Mr. Podgers mechanically, "and I make a reduction for families."

"Be quick," cried Lord Arthur, looking very pale and holding his hand out.

Mr. Podgers glanced nervously round and drew the heavy *portiere* across the door.

"It will take a little time, Lord Arthur. You had better sit down."

"Be quick, sir," cried Lord Arthur again, stamping his foot angrily on the polished floor.

Mr. Podgers smiled, drew from his breast-pocket a small magnifying glass, and wiped it carefully with his handkerchief.

"I am quite ready," he said.

CHAPTER 2

TEN MINUTES LATER, WITH face blanched by terror and eyes wild with grief, Lord Arthur Savile rushed from Bentinck House, crushing his way through the crowd of furcoated footmen that stood round the large striped awning, and seeming not to see or hear anything. The night was bitter cold, and the gas-lamps round the square flared and flickered in the keen wind, but his hands were hot with fever and his forehead burned like fire. On and on he went, almost with the gait of a drunken man. A policeman looked curiously at him as he passed, and a beggar, who slouched from an archway to ask for alms, grew frightened, seeing misery greater than his own. Once he stopped under a lamp and looked at his hands. He thought he could detect the stain of blood already upon them, and a faint cry broke from his trembling lips.

Murder! That is what the cheiromantist had seen there. Murder! The very night seemed to know it, and the desolate wind to howl it in his ear. The dark corners of the streets were full of it. It grinned at him from the roofs of the houses.

First he came to the park, whose sombre woodland seemed to fascinate him. He leaned wearily up against the railings, cooling his brow against the wet metal and listening to the tremulous silence of

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the trees. "Murder! murder!" he kept repeating, as though iteration could dim the horror of the word. The sound of his own voice made him shudder, yet he almost hoped that Echo might hear him and wake the slumbering city from its dreams. He felt a mad desire to stop the casual passer-by and tell him everything.

Then he wandered across Oxford Street into narrow shameful alleys. Two women with painted faces mocked at him as he went by. From a dark court-yard came a sound of oaths and blows, followed by shrill screams, and, huddled upon a damp door-step, he saw the crook-backed forms of poverty and eld. A strange pity came over him. Were these children of sin and misery predestined to their end, as he to his? Were they, like him, merely the puppets of a monstrous show?

And yet it was not the mystery, but the comedy of suffering that struck him; its absolute uselessness, its grotesque want of meaning. How incoherent everything seemed! How lacking in all harmony! He was amazed at the discord between the shallow optimism of the day and the real facts of existence. He was still very young.

After a time he found himself in front of Marylebone Church. The silent roadway looked like a long riband of polished silver, flecked here and there by the dark arabesques of waving shadows. Far into the distance curved the line of flickering gas-lamps, and outside a little walled-in house stood a solitary hansom, the driver asleep inside. He walked hastily in the direction of Portland Place, now and then looking round, as though he feared that he was being followed. At the corner of Rich Street stood two men, reading a small bill upon a hoarding. An odd feeling of curiosity stirred him, and he crossed over. As he came near, the word "Murder," printed in black letters, met his eye. He started, and a deep flush came into his cheek. It was an advertisement offering a reward for any information leading to the arrest of a man of medium height, between thirty and forty years of age, wearing a billycock hat, a black coat, and check trousers, and with a scar upon his right cheek. He read it over and over again, and wondered if the wretched man would be caught, and how he had been scarred. Perhaps, some day, his own name might be placarded on the walls of London. Some day, perhaps, a price would be set on his head also.

The thought made him sick with horror. He turned on his heel and hurried on into the night.

Where he went he hardly knew. He had a dim memory of wandering through a labyrinth of sordid houses, of being lost in a giant web of sombre streets, and it was

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bright dawn when he found himself at last in Piccadilly Circus. As he strolled home towards Belgrave Square, he met the great waggons on their way to Covent Garden. The white-smocked carters, with their pleasant sunburned faces and coarse curly hair, strode sturdily on, cracking their whips and calling out now and then to each other; on the back of a huge grey horse, the leader of a jangling team, sat a chubby boy, with a bunch of primroses in his battered hat, keeping tight hold of the mane with his little hands and laughing; and the great piles of vegetables looked like masses of jade against the morning sky, like masses of green jade against the pink petals of some marvellous rose. Lord Arthur felt curiously affected, he could not tell why. There was something in the dawn's delicate loveliness that seemed to him inexpressibly pathetic, and he thought of all the days that break in beauty and that set in storm. These rustics, too, with their rough, good-humoured voices and their nonchalant ways, what a strange London they saw! A London free from the sin of night and the smoke of day, a pallid ghostlike city, a desolate town of tombs! He wondered what they thought of it, and whether they knew anything of its splendour and its shame, of its fierce, fiery-coloured joys and its horrible hunger, of all it makes and mars from morn to eve. Probably it was to them merely a mart where they brought their fruits to sell, and where they tarried for a few hours at most, leaving the streets still silent, the houses still asleep. It gave him pleasure to watch them as they went by. Rude as they were, with their heavy hob-nailed shoes and their awkward gait, they brought a little of Arcady with them. He felt that they had lived with Nature and that she had taught them peace. He envied them all that they did not know.

By the time he had reached Belgrave Square, the sky was a faint blue and the birds were beginning to twitter in the gardens.

CHAPTER 3

When Lord Arthur woke it was twelve o'clock, and the midday sun was streaming through the ivory-silk curtains of his room. He got up and looked out of the window. A dim haze of heat was hanging over the great city, and the roofs of the houses were like dull silver. In the flickering green of the square below, some children were flitting about like white butterflies, and the pavement was crowded with people on their way to the park. Never had life seemed lovelier to him; never had the things of evil seemed more remote.

Then his valet brought him a cup of chocolate on a tray. After he had drunk it, he drew aside a

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heavy *portiere* of peach-coloured plush and passed into the bath-room. The light stole softly from above, through thin slabs of transparent onyx, and the water in the marble tank glimmered like a moonstone. He plunged hastily in, till the cool ripples touched throat and hair, and then dipped his head right under, as though he would have wiped away the stain of some shameful memory. When he stepped out, he felt almost at peace. The exquisite physical conditions of the moment had dominated him—as, indeed, often happens in the case of very finely wrought natures, for the senses, like fire, can purify as well as destroy.

After breakfast, he flung himself down on a divan and lit a cigarette. On the mantel-shelf, framed in dainty old brocade, stood a large photograph of Sybil Merton, as he had seen her first at Lady Noel's ball. The small, exquisitely shaped head drooped slightly to one side, as though the thin reedlike throat could hardly bear the burden of so much beauty; the lips were slightly parted, and seemed made for sweet music; and all the tender purity of girlhood looked out in wonder from the dreaming eyes. With her soft clinging dress of *crepe-de-chine* and her large, leaf-shaped fan, she looked like one of those delicate little figures men find in the olive-woods near Tanagra; and there was a touch of Greek grace in her pose and attitude. Yet she was not *petite*. She was simply perfectly proportioned—a rare thing in an age when so many women are either over life-size or insignificant.

Now as Lord Arthur looked at her, he was filled with the terrible pity that is born of love. He felt that to marry her, with the doom of murder hanging over his head, would be a betrayal like that of Judas, a sin worse than any the Borgia had ever dreamed of. What happiness could there be for them when at any moment he might be called upon to carry out the awful prophecy written in his hand? What manner of life would be theirs while Fate still held this fearful fortune in the scales? The marriage must be postponed, at all costs. Of this he was quite resolved. Ardently though he loved the girl—and the mere touch of her fingers, when they sat together, made each nerve of his body thrill with exquisite joy—he recognized none the less clearly where his duty lay, and was fully conscious of the fact that he had no right to marry until he had committed the murder. This done, he could stand before the altar with Sybil Merton and give his life into her hands without terror of wrong-doing. This done, he could take her to his arms, knowing that she would never have to blush for him, never have to hang

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her head in shame. But done it must be first; and the sooner the better for both.

Many men in his position would have preferred the primrose path of dalliance to the steep heights of duty, but Lord Arthur was too conscientious to set pleasure above principle. There was more than mere passion in his love, and Sybil was to him a symbol of all that is good and noble. For a moment he had a natural repugnance against what he was asked to do, but it soon passed away. His heart told him that it was not a sin, but a sacrifice; his reason reminded him that there was no other course open. He had to choose between living for himself and living for others, and terrible though the task laid upon him undoubtedly was, yet he knew that he must not suffer selfishness to triumph over love. Sooner or later we are all called upon to decide on the same issue—of us all, the same question is asked. To Lord Arthur it came early in life—before his nature had been spoiled by the calculating cynicism of middle age, or his heart corroded by the shallow fashionable egotism of our day, and he felt no hesitation about doing his duty. Fortunately also, for him, he was no mere dreamer, or idle dilettante. Had he been so, he would have hesitated, like Hamlet, and let irresolution mar his purpose. But he was essentially practical. Life to him meant action, rather than thought. He had that rarest of all things, common sense.

The wild turbid feeling of the previous night had by this time completely passed away, and it was almost with a sense of shame that he looked back upon his mad wanderings from street to street, his fierce emotional agony. The very sincerity of his sufferings made them seem unreal to him now. He wondered how he could have been so foolish as to rant and rave about the inevitable. The only question that seemed to trouble him was, whom to make away with; for he was not blind to the fact that murder, like the religions of the pagan world, requires a victim as well as a priest. Not being a genius, he had no enemies; and, indeed, he felt that this was not the time for the gratification of any personal pique or dislike, the mission in which he was engaged being one of great and grave solemnity. He accordingly made out a list of his friends and relatives on a sheet of note-paper, and after careful consideration, decided in favour of Lady Clementina Beauchamp, a dear old lady who lived in Curzon Street and was his own second cousin by his mother's side. He had always been very fond of Lady Clem, as every one called her, and as he was very wealthy himself—having come into all Lord Rugby's property when he came of age—there was no possi-

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bility of his deriving any vulgar monetary advantage by her death. In fact, the more he thought over the matter, the more she seemed to him to be just the right person, and, feeling that any delay would be unfair to Sybil, he determined to make his arrangements at once.

The first thing to be done was, of course, to settle with the cheiromantist; so he sat down at a small Sheraton writing-table that stood near the window, drew a cheque for £105 payable to the order of Mr. Septimus Podgers, and, enclosing it in an envelope, told his valet to take it to West Moon Street. He then telephoned to the stables for his hansom, and dressed to go out. As he was leaving the room, he looked back at Sybil Merton's photograph and swore that, come what may, he would never let her know what he was doing for her sake, but would keep the secret of his self-sacrifice hidden always in his heart.

On his way to the Buckingham, he stopped at a florist's, and sent Sybil a beautiful basket of narcissus, with lively white petals and staring pheasants' eyes, and on arriving at the club, went straight to the library, rang the bell, and ordered the waiter to bring him a lemon-and-soda, and a book on toxicology. He had fully decided that poison was the best means to adopt in this troublesome business. Anything like personal violence was extremely distasteful to him, and besides, he was very anxious not to murder Lady Clementina in any way that might attract public attention, as he hated the idea of being lionized at Lady Windermere's, or seeing his name figuring in the paragraphs of vulgar society newspapers. He had also to think of Sybil's father and mother, who were rather old-fashioned people, and might possibly object to the marriage if there was anything like a scandal, though he felt certain that if he told them the whole facts of the case they would be the very first to appreciate the motives that had actuated him. He had every reason, then, to decide in favour of poison. It was safe, sure, and quiet, and did away with any necessity for painful scenes, to which, like most Englishmen, he had a rooted objection.

Of the science of poisons, however, he knew absolutely nothing, and as the waiter seemed quite unable to find anything in the library but *Ruff's Guide* and *Bailey's Magazine,* he examined the book-shelves himself, and finally came across a handsomely bound edition of the *Pharmacopoeia* and a copy of Erskine's *Toxicology,* edited by Sir Mathew Reid, the President of the Royal College of Physicians and one of the oldest members of the Buckingham, having been elected in mistake for somebody else—a *contretemps* that so enraged the Committee

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that when the real man came up they blackballed him unanimously. Lord Arthur was a good deal puzzled at the technical terms used in both books, and had begun to regret that he had not paid more attention to his classics at Oxford, when in the second volume of Erskine, he found a very interesting and complete account of the properties of aconitine, written in fairly clear English. It seemed to him to be exactly the poison he wanted. It was swift—indeed, almost immediate in its effect—perfectly painless, and when taken in the form of a gelatine capsule, the mode recommended by Sir Mathew, not by any means unpalatable. He accordingly made a note, upon his shirt-cuff, of the amount necessary for a fatal dose, put the books back in their places, and strolled up St. James's Street to Pestle and Humbey's, the great chemists. Mr. Pestle, who always attended personally on the aristocracy, was a good deal surprised at the order, and in a very deferential manner murmured something about a medical certificate being necessary. However, as soon as Lord Arthur explained to him that it was for a large Norwegian mastiff that he was obliged to get rid of, as it showed signs of incipient rabies and had already bitten the coachman twice in the calf of the leg, he expressed himself as being perfectly satisfied, complimented Lord Arthur on his wonderful knowledge of toxicology, and had the prescription made up immediately.

Lord Arthur put the capsule into a pretty little silver *bonbonniere* that he saw in a shop window in Bond Street, threw away Pestle and Humbey's ugly pill-box, and drove off at once to Lady Clementina's.

"Well, *monsieur le mauvais sujet,*" cried the old lady as he entered the room, "why haven't you been to see me all this time?"

"My dear Lady Clem, I never have a moment to myself," said Lord Arthur, smiling.

"I suppose you mean that you go about all day long with Miss Sybil Merton, buying *chiffons* and talking nonsense? I cannot understand why people make such a fuss about being married. In my day we never dreamed of billing and cooing in public, or in private for that matter."

"I assure you I have not seen Sybil for twenty-four hours, Lady Clem. As far as I can make out, she belongs entirely to her milliners."

"Of course; that is the only reason you come to see an ugly old woman like myself. I wonder you men don't take warning. *On a fait des folies pour moi,* and here I am, a poor rheumatic creature with a false front and a bad temper. Why, if it were not for dear Lady Jansen, who sends me all the worst French novels she can find, I

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don't think I could get through the day. Doctors are no use at all, except to get fees out of one. They can't even cure my heartburn."

"I have brought you a cure for that, Lady Clem," said Lord Arthur gravely. "It is a wonderful thing, invented by an American."

"I don't think I like American inventions, Arthur. I am quite sure I don't. I read some American novels lately, and they were quite nonsensical."

"Oh, but there is no nonsense at all about this, Lady Clem! I assure you it is a perfect cure. You must promise to try it"; and Lord Arthur brought the little box out of his pocket and handed it to her.

"Well, the box is charming, Arthur. Is it really a present? That is very sweet of you. And is this the wonderful medicine? It looks like a *bonbon*. I'll take it at once."

"Good heavens! Lady Clem," cried Lord Arthur, catching hold of her hand, "you mustn't do anything of the kind. It is a homoeopathic medicine, and if you take it without having heartburn, it might do you no end of harm. Wait till you have an attack, and take it then. You will be astonished at the result."

"I should like to take it now," said Lady Clementina, holding up to the light the little transparent capsule, with its floating bubble of liquid aconitine. "I am sure it is delicious. The fact is that, though I hate doctors, I love medicines. However, I'll keep it till my next attack."

"And when will that be?" asked Lord Arthur eagerly. "Will it be soon?"

"I hope not for a week. I had a very bad time yesterday morning with it. But one never knows."

"You are sure to have one before the end of the month then, Lady Clem?"

"I am afraid so. But how sympathetic you are to-day, Arthur! Really, Sybil has done you a great deal of good. And now you must run away, for I am dining with some very dull people who won't talk scandal, and I know that if I don't get my sleep now I shall never be able to keep awake during dinner. Good-bye, Arthur. Give my love to Sybil, and thank you so much for the American medicine."

"You won't forget to take it, Lady Clem, will you?" said Lord Arthur, rising from his seat.

"Of course I won't, you silly boy. I think it is most kind of you to think of me, and I shall write and tell you if I want any more."

Lord Arthur left the house in high spirits and with a feeling of immense relief.

That night he had an interview with Sybil Merton. He told her how he had been suddenly placed in a position of terrible difficulty, from which neither honour nor duty would allow him to recede. He told her that the marriage

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must be put off for the present, as until he had got rid of his fearful entanglements, he was not a free man. He implored her to trust him, and not to have any doubts about the future. Everything would come right, but patience was necessary.

The scene took place in the conservatory of Mr. Merton's house, in Park Lane, where Lord Arthur had dined as usual. Sybil had never seemed more happy, and for a moment Lord Arthur had been tempted to play the coward's part, to write to Lady Clementina for the pill, and to let the marriage go on as if there was no such person as Mr. Podgers in the world. His better nature, however, soon asserted itself, and even when Sybil flung herself weeping into his arms, he did not falter. The beauty that stirred his senses had touched his conscience also. He felt that to wreck so fair a life for the sake of a few months' pleasure would be a wrong thing to do.

He stayed with Sybil till nearly midnight, comforting her and being comforted in turn, and early the next morning he left for Venice, after writing a manly, firm letter to Mr. Merton about the necessary postponement of the marriage.

CHAPTER 4

In Venice he met his brother, Lord Surbiton, who happened to have come over from Corfu in his yacht. The two young men spent a delightful fortnight together. In the morning they rode on the Lido, or glided up and down the green canals in their long black gondola; in the afternoon they usually entertained visitors on the yacht; and in the evening they dined at Florian's and smoked innumerable cigarettes on the Piazza. Yet somehow Lord Arthur was not happy. Every day he studied the obituary column in the *Times*, expecting to see a notice of Lady Clementina's death, but every day he was disappointed. He began to be afraid that some accident had happened to her, and often regretted that he had prevented her taking the aconitine when she had been so anxious to try its effect. Sybil's letters, too, though full of love, and trust, and tenderness, were often very sad in their tone, and sometimes he used to think that he was parted from her for ever.

After a fortnight Lord Surgiton got bored with Venice and determined to run down the coast to Ravenna, as he heard that there was some capital cock-shooting in the Pinetum. Lord Arthur at first refused absolutely to come, but Surbiton, of whom he was extremely fond, finally persuaded him that if he stayed at Danielli's by himself he would be moped to death, and on the morning of the 15th they started, with a strong nor'-east wind blowing and a rath-

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er choppy sea. The sport was excellent and the free open-air life brought the colour back to Lord Arthur's cheek, but about the 22nd he became anxious about Lady Clementina, and, in spite of Surbiton's remonstrances, came back to Venice by train.

As he stepped out of his gondola on to the hotel steps, the proprietor came forward to meet him with a sheaf of telegrams. Lord Arthur snatched them out of his hand and tore them open. Everything had been successful. Lady Clementina had died quite suddenly on the night of the 17th!

His first thought was for Sybil, and he sent her off a telegram announcing his immediate return to London. He then ordered his valet to pack his things for the night mail, sent his gondoliers about five times their proper fare, and ran up to his sitting-room with a light step and a buoyant heart. There he found three letters waiting for him. One was from Sybil herself, full of sympathy and condolence. The others were from his mother and from Lady Clementina's solicitor. It seemed that the old lady had dined with the duchess that very night, had delighted every one by her wit and *esprit*, but had gone home somewhat early, complaining of heartburn. In the morning she was found dead in her bed, having apparently suffered no pain. Sir Mathew Reid had been sent for at once, but, of course, there was nothing to be done, and she was to be buried on the 22nd at Beauchamp Chalcote. A few days before she died she had made her will, and left Lord Arthur his little house in Curzon Street and all her furniture, personal effects, and pictures, with the exception of her collection of miniatures, which was to go to her sister, Lady Margaret Rufford, and her amethyst necklace, which Sybil Merton was to have. The property was not of much value, but Mr. Mansfield, the solicitor, was extremely anxious for Lord Arthur to return at once, if possible, as there were a great many bills to be paid, and Lady Clementina had never kept any regular accounts.

Lord Arthur was very much touched by Lady Clementina's kind remembrance of him, and felt that Mr. Podgers had a great deal to answer for. His love of Sybil, however, dominated every other emotion, and the consciousness that he had done his duty gave him peace and comfort. When he arrived at Charing Cross, he felt perfectly happy.

The Mertons received him very kindly. Sybil made him promise that he would never again allow anything to come between them, and the marriage was fixed for the 7th June. Life seemed to him once more bright and beautiful, and all his old gladness came back to him again.

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One day, however, as he was going over the house in Curzon Street, in company with Lady Clementina's solicitor and Sybil herself, burning packages of faded letters and turning out drawers of odd rubbish, the young girl suddenly gave a little cry of delight.

"What have you found, Sybil?" said Lord Arthur, looking up from his work and smiling.

"This lovely little silver *bonbonniere,* Arthur. Isn't it quaint and Dutch? Do give it to me! I know amethysts won't become me till I am over eighty."

It was the box that had held the aconitine.

Lord Arthur started, and a faint blush came into his cheek. He had almost entirely forgotten what he had done, and it seemed to him a curious coincidence that Sybil, for whose sake he had gone through all that terrible anxiety, should have been the first to remind him of it.

"Of course you can have it, Sybil. I gave it to poor Lady Clem myself."

"Oh! thank you, Arthur; and may I have the *bonbon* too? I had no notion that Lady Clementina liked sweets. I thought she was far too intellectual."

Lord Arthur grew deadly pale, and a horrible idea crossed his mind.

"*Bonbon,* Sybil? What do you mean?" he said in a slow hoarse voice.

"There is one in it, that is all. It looks quite old and dusty, and I have not the slightest intention of eating it. What is the matter, Arthur? How white you look!"

Lord Arthur rushed across the room and seized the box. Inside it was the amber-coloured capsule, with its poison-bubble. Lady Clementina had died a natural death after all!

The shock of the discovery was almost too much for him. He flung the capsule into the fire, and sank on the sofa with a cry of despair.

CHAPTER 5

MR. MERTON WAS A GOOD DEAL distressed at the second postponement of the marriage, and Lady Julia, who had already ordered her dress for the wedding, did all in her power to make Sybil break off the match. Dearly, however, as Sybil loved her mother, she had given her whole life into Lord Arthur's hands, and nothing that Lady Julia could say could make her waver in her faith. As for Lord Arthur himself, it took him days to get over his terrible disappointment, and for a time his nerves were completely unstrung. His excellent common sense, however, soon asserted itself, and his sound practical mind did not leave him long in doubt about what to do. Poison having proved a complete failure, dynamite, or some other

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form of explosive, was obviously the proper thing to try.

He accordingly looked again over the list of his friends and relatives, and, after careful consideration, determined to blow up his uncle, the Dean of Chichester. The Dean, who was a man of great culture and learning, was extremely fond of clocks, and had a wonderful collection of timepieces, ranging from the fifteenth century to the present day, and it seemed to Lord Arthur that this hobby of the good Dean's offered him an excellent opportunity for carrying out his scheme. Where to procure an explosive machine was, of course, quite another matter. The London Directory gave him no information on the point, and he felt that there was very little use in going to Scotland Yard about it, as they never seemed to know anything about the movements of the dynamite faction till after an explosion had taken place, and not much even then.

Suddenly he thought of his friend Rouvaloff, a young Russian of very revolutionary tendencies, whom he had met at Lady Windermere's in the winter. Count Rouvaloff was supposed to be writing a life of Peter the Great, and to have come over to England for the purpose of studying the documents relating to that Tsar's residence in this country as a ship carpenter, but it was generally suspected that he was a nihilist agent, and there was no doubt that the Russian Embassy did not look with any favour upon his presence in London. Lord Arthur felt that he was just the man for his purpose, and drove down one morning to his lodgings in Bloomsbury to ask his advice and assistance.

"So you are taking up politics seriously?" said Count Rouvaloff, when Lord Arthur had told him the object of his mission; but Lord Arthur, who hated swagger of any kind, felt bound to admit to him that he had not the slightest interest in social questions and simply wanted the explosive machine for a purely family matter, in which no one was concerned but himself.

Count Rouvaloff looked at him for some moments in amazement, and then seeing that he was quite serious, wrote an address on a piece of paper, initialled it, and handed it to him across the table.

"Scotland Yard would give a good deal to know this address, my dear fellow."

"They sha'n't have it," cried Lord Arthur, laughing; and after shaking the young Russian warmly by the hand, he ran downstairs, examined the paper, and told the coachman to drive to Soho Square.

There he dismissed him, and strolled down Greek Street till he came to a place called Bayle's Court. He passed under the archway, and found himself in a curi-

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ous *cul-de-sac* that was apparently occupied by a French laundry, as a perfect network of clothes-lines was stretched across from house to house and there was a flutter of white linen in the morning air. He walked right to the end and knocked at a little green house. After some delay, during which every window in the court became a blurred mass of peering faces, the door was opened by a rather rough-looking foreigner, who asked him in very bad English what his business was. Lord Arthur handed him the paper Count Rouvaloff had given him. When the man saw it, he bowed and invited Lord Arthur into a very shabby front parlour on the ground floor, and in a few moments Herr Winckelkopf, as he was called in England, bustled into the room, with a very wine-stained napkin round his neck and a fork in his left hand.

"Count Rouvaloff has given me an introduction to you," said Lord Arthur, bowing, "and I am anxious to have a short interview with you on a matter of business. My name is Smith, Mr. Robert Smith, and I want you to supply me with an explosive clock."

"Charmed to meet you, Lord Arthur," said the genial little German, laughing. "Don't look so alarmed; it is my duty to know everybody, and I remember seeing you one evening at Lady Windermere's. I hope her ladyship is quite well. Do you mind sitting with me while I finish my breakfast? There is an excellent *pate,* and my friends are kind enough to say that my Rhine wine is better than any they get at the German Embassy," and before Lord Arthur had got over his surprise at being recognized, he found himself seated in the back-room, sipping the most delicious Marcobrunner out of a pale yellow hockglass marked with the Imperial monogram and chatting in the friendliest manner possible to the famous conspirator.

"Explosive clocks," said Herr Winckelkopf, "are not very good things for foreign exportation, as, even if they succeed in passing the Custom House, the train service is so irregular that they usually go off before they have reached their proper destination. If, however, you want one for home use, I can supply you with an excellent article, and guarantee that you will be satisfied with the result. May I ask for whom it is intended? If it is for the police, or for any one connected with Scotland Yard, I am afraid I cannot do anything for you. The English detectives are really our best friends, and I have always found that by relying on their stupidity, we can do exactly what we like. I could not spare one of them."

"I assure you," said Lord Arthur, "that it has nothing to do with the police. The clock is intended for the Dean of Chichester."

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"Dear me! I had no idea that you felt so strongly about religion, Lord Arthur. Few young men do nowadays."

"I am afraid you overrate me, Herr Winckelkopf," said Lord Arthur, blushing. "The fact is, I really know nothing about theology."

"It is a purely private matter then?"

"Purely private."

Herr Winckelkopf shrugged his shoulders and left the room, returning in a few minutes with a round cake of dynamite about the size of a penny and a pretty little French clock surmounted by an ormolu figure of Liberty trampling on the hydra of Despotism.

Lord Arthur's face brightened up when he saw it. "That is just what I want," he cried; "and now tell me how it goes off."

"Ah! there is my secret," answered Herr Winckelkopf, contemplating his invention with a justifiable look of pride; "let me know when you wish it to explode, and I will set the machine to the moment."

"Well, to-day is Tuesday, and if you could send it off at once——"

"That is impossible; I have a great deal of important work on hand for some friends of mine in Moscow. Still, I might send it off to-morrow."

"Oh, it will be quite time enough!" said Lord Arthur politely, "if it is delivered to-morrow night or Thursday morning. For the moment of the explosion, say Friday at noon exactly. The dean is always at home at that hour."

"Friday, at noon," repeated Herr Winckelkopf, and he made a note to that effect in a large ledger that was lying on a bureau near the fireplace.

"And now," said Lord Arthur, rising from his seat, "pray let me know how much I am in your debt."

"It is such a small matter, Lord Arthur, that I do not care to make any charge. The dynamite comes to seven and sixpence, the clock will be three pounds ten, and the carriage about five shillings. I am only too pleased to oblige any friend of Count Rouvaloff's."

"But your trouble, Herr Winckelkopf?"

"Oh, that is nothing! It is a pleasure to me. I do not work for money; I live entirely for my art."

Lord Arthur laid down £4, 2s. 6d. on the table, thanked the little German for his kindness, and, having succeeded in declining an invitation to meet some Anarchists at a meat-tea on the following Saturday, left the house and went off to the park.

For the next two days he was in a state of the greatest excitement, and on Friday at twelve o'clock he drove down to the Buckingham to wait for news. All the afternoon the stolid hall-porter kept posting up telegrams from various parts of the country giving the results of

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horseraces, the verdicts in divorce suits, the state of the weather, and the like, while the tape ticked out wearisome details about an all-night sitting in the House of Commons and a small panic on the Stock Exchange. At four o'clock the evening papers came in, and Lord Arthur disappeared into the library with the *Pall Mall*, the *St. James's*, the *Globe*, and the *Echo*, to the immense indignation of Colonel Goodchild, who wanted to read the reports of a speech he had delivered that morning at the Mansion House on the subject of South African Missions and the advisability of having black Bishops in every province, and for some reason or other had a strong prejudice against the *Evening News*. None of the papers, however, contained even the slightest allusion to Chichester, and Lord Arthur felt that the attempt must have failed. It was a terrible blow to him, and for a time he was quite unnerved. Herr Winckelkopf, whom he went to see the next day, was full of elaborate apologies, and offered to supply him with another clock free of charge, or with a case of nitroglycerine bombs at cost price. But he had lost all faith in explosives, and Herr Winckelkopf himself acknowledged that everything is so adulterated nowadays that even dynamite can hardly be got in a pure condition. The little German, however, while admitting that something must have gone wrong with the machinery, was not without hope that the clock might still go off, and instanced the case of a barometer that he had once sent to the military governor at Odessa which, though timed to explode in ten days, had not done so for something like three months. It was quite true that when it did go off, it merely succeeded in blowing a housemaid to atoms, the governor having gone out of town six weeks before, but at least it showed that dynamite, as a destructive force, was, when under the control of machinery, a powerful, though a somewhat unpunctual agent. Lord Arthur was a little consoled by this reflection, but even here he was destined to disappointment, for two days afterwards, as he was going upstairs, the duchess called him into her boudoir and showed him a letter she had just received from the Deanery.

"Jane writes charming letters," said the duchess; "you must really read her last. It is quite as good as the novels Mudie sends us."

Lord Arthur seized the letter from her hand. It ran as follows:

THE DEANERY, CHICHESTER,
27th May.

My Dearest Aunt,

Thank you so much for the flannel for the Dorcas Society, and also for the gingham. I quite agree with you that it is nonsense their wanting to wear pretty things, but everybody is so Radical and irreligious nowa-

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days, that it is difficult to make them see that they should not try and dress like the upper classes. I am sure I don't know what we are coming to. As Papa has often said in his sermons, we live in an age of unbelief.

We have had great fun over a clock that an unknown admirer sent Papa last Thursday. It arrived in a wooden box from London, carriage paid, and Papa feels it must have been sent by some one who had read his remarkable sermon, "Is Licence Liberty?" for on the top of the clock was a figure of a woman, with what Papa said was the cap of Liberty on her head. I didn't think it very becoming myself, but Papa said it was historical, so I suppose it is all right. Parker unpacked it, and Papa put it on the mantelpiece in the library, and we were all sitting there on Friday morning when, just as the clock struck twelve, we heard a whirring noise, a little puff of smoke came from the pedestal of the figure, and the goddess of Liberty fell off and broke her nose on the fender! Maria was quite alarmed, but it looked so ridiculous that James and I went off into fits of laughter, and even Papa was amused. When we examined it, we found it was a sort of alarum clock, and that, if you set it to a particular hour, and put some gunpowder and a cap under a little hammer, it went off whenever you wanted. Papa said it must not remain in the library, as it made a noise, so Reggie carried it away to the schoolroom and does nothing but have small explosions all day long. Do you think Arthur would like one for a wedding present? I suppose they are quite fashionable in London. Papa says they should do a great deal of good, as they show that Liberty can't last, but must fall down. Papa says Liberty was invented at the time of the French Revolution. How awful it seems!

I have now to go to the Dorcas, where I will read them your most instructive letter. How true, dear Aunt, your idea is, that in their rank of life they should wear what is unbecoming. I must say it is absurd, their anxiety about dress, when there are so many more important things in this world and in the next. I am so glad your flowered poplin turned out so well, and that your lace was not torn. I am wearing my yellow satin, that you so kindly gave me, at the Bishop's on Wednesday, and think it will look all right. Would you have bows or not? Jennings says that every one wears bows now, and that the under-skirt should be frilled. Reggie has just had another explosion, and Papa has ordered the clock to be sent to the stables. I don't think Papa likes it so much as he did at first, though he is very flattered at being sent such a pretty and ingenious toy. It shows that people read his sermons and profit by them.

Papa sends his love, in which James, and Reggie, and Maria all unite, and, hoping that Uncle Cecil's gout is better, believe me, dear Aunt, ever your affecitonate niece,

JANE PERCY.

PS.—Do tell me about the bows. Jennings insists they are the fashion.

Lord Arthur looked so serious and unhappy over the letter that the duchess went into fits of laughter.

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"My dear Arthur," she cried, "I shall never show you a young lady's letter again! But what shall I say about the clock? I think it is a capital invention, and I should like to have one myself."

"I don't think much of them," said Lord Arthur, with a sad smile, and, after kissing his mother, he left the room.

When he got upstairs, he flung himself on a sofa, and his eyes filled with tears. He had done his best to commit this murder, but on both occasions he had failed, and through no fault of his own. He had tried to do his duty, but it seemed as if Destiny herself had turned traitor. He was oppressed with the sense of the barrenness of good intentions, of the futility of trying to be fine. Perhaps it would be better to break off the marriage altogether. Sybil would suffer, it is true, but suffering could not really mar a nature so noble as hers. As for himself, what did it matter? There is always some war in which a man can die, some cause to which a man can give his life, and as life had no pleasure for him, so death had no terror. Let Destiny work out his doom. He would not stir to help her.

At half-past seven he dressed and went down to the club. Surbiton was there with a party of young men, and he was obliged to dine with them. Their trivial conversation and idle jests did not interest him, and as soon as coffee was brought he left them, inventing some engagement in order to get away. As he was going out of the club, the hall-porter handed him a letter. It was from Herr Winckelkopf, asking him to call down the next evening and look at an explosive umbrella that went off as soon as it was opened. It was the very latest invention, and had just arrived from Geneva. He tore the letter up into fragments. He had made up his mind not to try any more experiments. Then he wandered down to the Thames Embankment and sat for hours by the river. The moon peered through a mane of tawny clouds, as if it were a lion's eye, and innumerable stars spangled the hollow vault, like gold dust powdered on a purple dome. Now and then a barge swung out into the turbid stream and floated away with the tide, and the railway signals changed from green to scarlet as the trains ran shrieking across the bridge. After some time, twelve o'clock boomed from the tall tower at Westminster, and at each stroke of the sonorous bell the night seemed to tremble. Then the railway lights went out, one solitary lamp left gleaming like a large ruby on a giant mast, and the roar of the city became fainter.

At two o'clock he got up and strolled towards Blackfriars. How unreal everything looked! How like a strange dream! The houses on the other side of the river

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seemed built out of darkness. One would have said that silver and shadow had fashioned the world anew. The huge dome of St. Paul's loomed like a bubble through the dusky air.

As he approached Cleopatra's Needle he saw a man leaning over the parapet, and as he came nearer the man looked up, the gas-light falling full upon his face.

It was Mr. Podgers, the cheiromantist! No one could mistake the fat flabby face, the gold-rimmed spectacles, the sickly feeble smile, the sensual mouth.

Lord Arthur stopped. A brilliant idea flashed across him, and he stole softly up behind. In a moment he had seized Mr. Podgers by the legs and flung him into the Thames. There was a coarse oath, a heavy splash, and all was still. Lord Arthur looked anxiously over, but could see nothing of the cheiromantist but a tall hat, pirouetting in an eddy of moonlit water. After a time it also sank, and no trace of Mr. Podgers was visible. Once he thought that he caught sight of the bulky misshapen figure striking out for the staircase by the bridge, and a horrible feeling of failure came over him, but it turned out to be merely a reflection, and when the moon shone out from behind a cloud, it passed away. At last he seemed to have realized the decree of destiny. He heaved a deep sigh of relief, and Sybil's name came to his lips.

"Have you dropped anything, sir?" said a voice behind him suddenly.

He turned round and saw a policeman with a bull's-eye lantern.

"Nothing of importance, Sergeant," he answered, smiling, and hailing a passing hansom, he jumped in and told the man to drive to Belgrave Square.

For the next few days he alternated between hope and fear. There were moments when he almost expected Mr. Podgers to walk into the room, and yet at other times he felt that Fate could not be so unjust to him. Twice he went to the cheiromantist's address in West Moon Street, but he could not bring himself to ring the bell. He longed for certainty, and was afraid of it.

Finally it came. He was sitting in the smoking-room of the club, having tea and listening rather wearily to Surbiton's account of the last comic song at the Gaiety, when the waiter came in with the evening papers. He took up the *St. James's*, and was listlessly turning over its pages, when this strange heading caught his eye:

SUICIDE OF A CHEIROMANTIST

He turned pale with excitement and began to read. The paragraph ran as follows:

Yesterday morning, at seven o'clock, the body of Mr. Septimus R.

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Podgers, the eminent cheiromantist, was washed on shore at Greenwich, just in front of the Ship Hotel. The unfortunate gentleman had been missing for some days, and considerable anxiety for his safety had been felt in cheiromantic circles. It is supposed that he committed suicide under the influence of a temporary mental derangement, caused by overwork, and a verdict to that effect was returned this afternoon by the coroner's jury. Mr. Podgers had just completed an elaborate treatise on the subject of the human hand that will shortly be published, when it will no doubt attract much attention. The deceased was sixty-five years of age, and does not seem to have left any relations.

Lord Arthur rushed out of the club with the paper still in his hand, to the immense amazement of the hallporter who tried in vain to stop him, and drove at once to Park Lane. Sybil saw him from the window, and something told her that he was the bearer of good news. She ran down to meet him, and when she saw his face, she knew that all was well.

"My dear Sybil," cried Lord Arthur, "let us be married to-morrow!"

"You foolish boy! Why, the cake is not even ordered!" said Sybil, laughing through her tears.

CHAPTER 6

WHEN THE WEDDING TOOK place some three weeks later, St. Peter's was crowded with a perfect mob of smart people. The service was read in the most impressive manner by the Dean of Chichester, and everybody agreed that they had never seen a handsomer couple than the bride and bridegroom. They were more than handsome, however—they were happy. Never for a single moment did Lord Arthur regret all that he had suffered for Sybil's sake, while she, on her side, gave him the best things a woman can give to any man—worship, tenderness, and love. For them romance was not killed by reality.

Some years afterwards, when two beautiful children had been born to them, Lady Windermere came down on a visit to Alton Priory, a lovely old place that had been the duke's wedding present to his son; and one afternoon as she was sitting with Lady Arthur under a limetree in the garden, watching the little boy and girl as they played up and down the rose-walk, like fitful sunbeams, she suddenly took her hostess's hand in hers, and said, "Are you happy, Sybil?"

"Dear Lady Windermere, of course I am happy. Aren't you?"

"I have no time to be happy, Sybil. I always like the last person who is introduced to me; but, as a rule, as soon as I know people, I get tired of them."

"Don't your lions satisfy you, Lady Windermere?"

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"Oh dear, no! Lions are only good for one season. As soon as their manes are cut, they are the dullest creatures going. Besides, they behave very badly, if you are really nice to them. Do you remember that horrid Mr. Podgers? He was a dreadful impostor. Of course, I didn't mind that at all, and even when he wanted to borrow money I forgave him, but I could not stand his making love to me. He has really made me hate cheiromancy. I go in for telepathy now. It is much more amusing."

"You mustn't say anything against cheiromancy here, Lady Windermere; it is the only subject that Arthur does not like people to chaff about. I assure you he is quite serious over it."

"You don't mean to say that he believes in it, Sybil?"

"Ask him, Lady Windermere, here he is"; and Lord Arthur came up the garden with a large bunch of yellow roses in his hand, and his two children dancing round him.

"Lord Arthur?"

"Yes, Lady Windermere."

"You don't mean to say that you believe in cheiromancy?"

"Of course I do," said the young man, smiling.

"But why?"

"Because I owe to it all the happiness of my life," he murmured, throwing himself into a wicker chair.

"My dear Lord Arthur, what do you owe to it?"

"Sybil," he answered, handing his wife the roses and looking into her violet eyes.

"What nonsense!" cried Lady Windermere. "I never heard such nonsense in all my life."

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PURE WATER FROM SALT

by Theodore L. Thomas

THE WORLD'S MOST PRECIOUS mineral is becoming in short supply. This mineral is water, and it is growing scarce in many parts of the world. As long ago as 1952 the United States government opened a major research and development program to overcome the fast-growing shortage. That program is bigger than ever now, and most of it is devoted to the purification of sea water.

Water in the oceans runs about 3.3 to 3.5 percent by weight dissolved salts. Since fresh water is defined by the U. S. Public Health Service as water that contains less than 0.005 percent dissolved salts, there's your problem. All you have to do is remove some 3.25 to 3.45 percent dissolved salts. It's an easy problem to solve, too. Any chemical engineer can tell you how to do it. The trouble is, you have to turn out this fresh water at a price somewhere near the current 20 cents per 1,000 gallons cost of municipal water, and there's the rub.

There are three different approaches under test. The first involves distillation or evaporation of fresh water, leaving the dissolved solids behind. Several demonstrations plants have been built in this country to try out different distillation processes. The second approach involves electric dialysis. In this process an electric current drives sodium, chloride, and other ions through a plastic membrane, leaving fresh water behind. The third and latest approach is the freeze-separation process. This one works on the principle that salt is largely excluded from the ice crystals that form when salt water is cooled to the freezing point. All three of these processes have some promise of future success.

But it is possible to wonder if maybe the wrong technical people are working on the problem. Instead of chemists, chemical engineers, and people of a few other disciplines, maybe what we need are a few physiologists and biochemists. Instead of taking the salt out of the water, part of the problem at least could be solved by making it possible for people to drink salt water. Certain sea birds have an organ in their heads that

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aids in the discharging of excess salt. Under unusual conditions in the past, men have consumed without harm amounts of sea water supposed to be fatal. Something unknown is at work here. Or again, it might be possible for a man to take a pill of a yet-unknown sequestering agent that will tie up the harmful ions before they can travel very far in the bloodstream. And then we can all go down to the sea and have a refreshing drink of sea water.

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Among the minor and more antick discoveries of Americanology is that the Spirits of the Indian dead, who had in pre-Columbian times been content with offerings of moose-marrow and wampum, developed in the 18th C. a curious taste for—of all conceivable confected things!—Tincture of Benzoin! The goblins of Melanasia now disdain their former tastes for native nutriment and can be coddled only with "cargo": *goods of foreign manufacture. So changes the habits of netherworld denizens in other time and place. Is New York City to be exempt? Harry Harrison (CAPTAIN HONARIO HARPPLAYER, R.N., F&SF, March 1963), who is now buzzing like a one-man swarm of bees back and forth across the Continent of Europe, doubtless has many unpublicized reasons for his distant remove from the City of New York. Can it be that one of them was a singularly disturbing experience one night whilst waiting for the Queens train in a semi-deserted INDependent subway station?* Quien sabe? *After reading this, you may prefer taxis, and damn the cost . . .*

INCIDENT IN THE IND

by Harry Harrison

"THANK GOD *that's* DONE," Adriann DuBois' voice bounced harshly from the tiled walls of the subway passage, punctuated by the sharp clack-clack of her high stiletto heels. There was a rattling rumble as an express train rushed through the station ahead and a wave of musty air washed over them.

"It's after one A.M." Chester said and yawned widely and pressed the back of his hand to his mouth. "We'll probably have to wait an hour for a train."

"Don't be so negative, Chester," she said, and her voice had the same metallic ring as her heelsteps. "All the copy is finished now for the new account, we'll probably get a bonus, and we can take most of the day off tomorrow. Think positive like that and you'll feel a lot better, I assure you."

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They reached the turnstile at that moment, before Chester could think of a snappy answer that didn't reek too much of one o'clock in the morning, and he fumbled a token into the slot. Adriann swept through as he probed deeper into his change pocket and discovered that this had been his last token. He turned wearily back to the change booth and muttered two or three good, dirty words under his breath.

"How many?" a voice mumbled from the dimness of the barred steel cell.

"Three, please," he slipped two quarters in through the tiny window. It wasn't that he minded paying her damn fare, after all she was a woman, but he wished she would at least say thanks or even nod her head to show that she didn't get into subways by divine right. After all they both worked in the same nutfactory and earned the same money, and now she would be earning more. He had forgotten that last little fact for a moment. The slot swallowed his token and went chunk and he pushed through.

"I take the last car," Adriann said, squinting nearsightedly down the dark and empty tunnel. "Let's walk back to the end of the platform."

"I need the middle of the train," Chester said, but had to trot after her. Adriann never heard what she didn't need to hear.

"There's something I can tell you now, Chester," she began in her brisk man-to-man voice. "I couldn't really mention this before, since we both were doing the same work and in one sense competing for position. But since Blaisdell's coronary will have him out for a couple of weeks I'll be acting copy chief, with some more money to match—"

"I heard from the latrine grapevine. Congrats—"

"—so I'm in a position to pass on a bit of good advice to you. You have to push more, Chester, grab onto things when they come along . . ."

"For chrissake, Adriann, you sound like a bad commercial for crowded streetcars."

"And that sort of thing too. Little jokes. People begin to think you don't take your work seriously and that is sure death in the ad business."

"Of course I don't take the work seriously—who in their right mind could?" He heard a rumbling and looked, but the tunnel was still empty; it must have been a truck in the street above. "Are you going to tell me that you really *care* about writing deathless prose about milady's armpits smelling the right way by using the right Stink-go-Way?"

"Don't be vulgar, Chester, you know you can be sweet when you want to," she said, taking advantage of female reasoning to ignore

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his arguments and to inject a note of emotion into a previously logical conversation.

"You're damn right I can be sweet," he said huskily, not adverse to a little emotion himself. With her mouth shut Adriann was pretty attractive in a past-thirtyish way. The knitted dress did wonders for her bottom, and undoubtedly the foundation-maker's artifice had something to do with the outstanding attraction of her frontpiece, but more in underpinning than in padding, he was willing to bet.

He shuffled close and slipped his arms around her waist and patted lightly on the top of her flank. "I can be sweet and I can remember a time when you didn't mind being sweet right back."

"That's a long time finished, boy," she said in her schoolmarm voice and peeled his arms away with a picking-up-worms expression. Chester's newspaper fell out from under his arm where he had stuffed it and he bent over mumbling to pick it up from the gritty platform.

She was quiet for a moment after this, twisting her skirt around a bit and rubbing out the wrinkles as if brushing away the contamination of his touch. There were no sounds from the street overhead and the long, dimly lit station was as silent as a burial vault. They were alone with the strange loneliness that can be experienced only in a large city, of people somewhere always close by, yet always cut off. Tired, suddenly depressed, Chester lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply.

"You're not allowed to smoke in the subway," Adriann said with detached coldness.

"I'm not allowed to smoke, nor to give you a little squeeze, to make jokes in the office, or to look with justified contempt at our current client."

"No you're not," she snapped and leveled a delicate finger with a blood-red nail at him. "And since you brought it up, I'll tell you something else. Other people in the office have noticed it too, and this I *know*. You have been with the firm longer than I, so they considered you for the copy chief's job—and turned you down. And I was told in utmost confidence that they are actually considering letting you go. Does that mean anything to you?"

"It does. It means I have been nursing a viper in my bosom. I seem to remember that I got you this job and even had to convince old Blaisdell that you could do the work. You acted right grateful too, at the time—remember those passionate scenes in the foyer of your boarding house?"

"Don't be a pig!"

"Now the passion is dead, so is any chance of a raise, and it looks like my job is out the window as well. With dear Adriann for a

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friend who needs an enemy . . ."

"There are things living in the subway, you know."

The voice was husky and trembled, it came suddenly from behind them, from what they thought was the empty platform, startling them both. Adriann gasped and turned quickly. There was a pool of darkness next to the large litter bin and neither of them had noticed the man slumped against the wall, seated there. He struggled to his feet and stepped forward.

"How dare you!" Adriann said shrilly, startled and angry. "Hiding there, eavesdropping on a private conversation. Aren't there any police in this subway?"

"There are *things,* you know," the man said, ignoring her, grinning up at Chester, his head twisted to one side.

He was a bum, one of the crimpled horde that splattered out over New York City when the Bowery elevated was torn down and light penetrated that clogged street of human refuse. Photophobes to a man, they stumbled away seeking dimmer illumination. For many of them the gloomed caverns of the subways offered refuge, heated cars in the winter, toilet facilities, panhandling prospects, quiet corners for collapsing. This one wore the uniform of his trade: shapeless, filthy pants with most of the fly buttons missing, crumpled jacket tied close with string with a number of unusual undergarments visible at the open neck, shoes cracked, split and flapping, darkened skin as wrinkled as a mummy's with a pencil line of dirt in every crack. His mouth was a dark orifice, the few remaining teeth standing like stained tombstones in memory of their vanished brothers. Examined in detail the man was a revolting sight, but so commonplace to this city that he was as much a part of it as the wire trash baskets and the steaming manholes.

"What kind of things?" Chester asked while he groped in his pocket for a dime to buy their freedom. Adriann turned her back on them both.

"Things that live in the earth," the bum said and smiled blearily, pressing a grimy finger to his lips. "People who know never talk about it. Don't want to frighten the tourists away, no they don't. Scales, claws, down here in the subway darkness."

"Give him some money—get rid of him—this is terrible!" Adriann said shrilly.

Chester dropped two nickels into the cupped hand, carefully, from a few inches above so he wouldn't have to touch the stained skin.

"What do these things do?" he asked, not because he really cared what the man had to say, but to annoy Adriann, a touch of the old sadist nudging him on.

The bum rubbed the nickles to-

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gether in his palm. "They live here, hiding, looking out, that's what they do. You should give them something when you're alone, late at night like this, staying near the end of the platform. Pennies are good, just put them down there at the edge where they can reach up and get them. Dimes good too, but no nickles like you gave me."

"You're hearing a very fancy panhandle story," Adriann said, angry now that her first fright had gone. "Now get away from that old tramp."

"Why only pennies and dimes?" Chester asked, interested in spite of himself. It *was* very black over the edge of the platform: anything could be hiding there.

"Pennies because they like peanuts, they work the machines with pennies when no one is around. And dimes for the coke machines, they drink that sometimes instead of water. I've seen them . . ."

"I'm going for a policeman," Adriann snorted and click-clacked away, but stopped after she had gone about ten yards. Both men ignored her.

"Come on now," Chester smiled at the bum who was running trembling fingers through his matted hair, "you can't expect me to believe that. If these things eat only peanuts there is no reason to buy them off—"

"I didn't say that was all they ate!" the grimy hand locked on Chester's sleeve before he could move away, and he recoiled from the man's breath as he leaned close to whisper. "What they really like to eat is *people,* but they won't bother you as long as you leave them a little something. Would you like to see one?"

"After this build-up I certainly would."

The bum tottered over to the waste-paper receptacle, big as a trunk on end, olive drab metal with two flap doors in the hat-like cover.

"Now you just gotta take a quick look because they don't like to be looked at," the man said and gave one of the flaps a push in and let go.

Chester stepped back, startled. He had had only a glimpse, had he really seen two glowing red spots in there, a foot apart, monstrous eyes? Could there be—no the whole thing was just too damn silly. There was the distant rumble of a train.

"Great show, dad," he said, and dropped some pennies near the edge of the platform. "That'll keep them in peanuts for awhile." He walked quickly down to Adriann. "The spiel got better after you left, the old buzzard swears that one of the things is hiding there in the trash can. So I left a bribe—just in case."

"How can you be so stupid—"

You're tired, dear—and your claws are showing. And you're being repetitive as well."

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The train rattled closer, sweeping a cloud of dead air before it. Musty air, almost like the smell of an animal . . . he had never noticed that before.

"You are stupid—and superstitious," she had to raise her voice above the roar of the approaching train. "You're the kind of person who knocks on wood, and won't step on cracks and worries about black cats."

"I sure am, because it doesn't hurt. There's enough bad luck around as it is without looking for any more. There probably isn't a *thing* in that trash can—but I'm not going to put my arm in there to find out."

"You're a simple-minded child."

"Oh, am I!" They were both shouting now to be heard above the train that was rocking by next to them, brakes squealing to a stop. "Well let's see you put *your* arm in there."

"Childish!"

It was late and Chester was tired and his temper was frayed. The train shuddered to a halt behind him. He ran towards the end of the platform, digging in his pocket and pulling out all of his loose change.

"Here," he shouted, pushing the flap of the waste bin in an inch and pouring the coins through the gap, "Money. Plenty dimes, pennies. Plenty cokes, peanuts. You grab and eat next person who comes here."

Behind him Adriann was laughing. The train doors shooshed open and the old bum shuffled into the car.

"That's your Queens' train," Adriann said, still laughing. "Better take it before the *things* get you. I'm waiting for the uptown local."

"Take this," he said, still angry, holding out his newspaper to her. "This is so funny, you're not superstitious—let's see you put this in the basket." He jumped for the train doors, catching them just as they closed.

"Of course, darling," she called,

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her face red from laughing. "And I'll tell the office about it tomorrow—" the doors slid shut cutting off the rest of her words.

The train shuddered a bit and started to move. Through the dirt-stained glass he saw her walk to the waste container and shove the paper in through the flap. One of the pillars came between them as the train picked up speed.

Then he saw her again and she still had her hand to the lid—or had she poked her arm in up to the elbow?—it was hard to tell through the dirty glass. Then another pillar, they were beginning to flicker by. Another glimpse and with the blurred window and the bad light he couldn't be sure but it looked like she was bent over and had poked her head into the opening.

This window was no good. He ran the few steps to the rear of the car where a larger—and somewhat cleaner window—was set into the rear door. The train was halfway down the platform now, swaying as it picked up speed and he had a last glimpse of her before the row of pillars merged into a blur that cut off vision completely.

She couldn't possibly be halfway into that container, the flapped opening certainly wasn't big enough for a person to get through. Yet how else to explain that he had seen just her skirt and legs sticking out, wiggling wildly in the air?

Of course it had been only a blurred glimpse and he was mistaken. He turned back to the empty car, no, not empty. The bum slumped in a seat, already asleep.

The ragged man looked up at Chester, gave him a quick, secretive grin, then closed his eyes again. Chester went to the other end of the car and sat down. He yawned and scrunched lower.

He could doze until they reached his station; he always woke up in time.

It would be nice if the copy chief's job was still open, he could use the extra money.

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BOOKS

WAY STATION, **Clifford D. Simak,** Doubleday, $3.50

Nice Mr. Simak has this time written a novel which is better than his last one. Science Fiction, contemplating its navel, comes up again and again with a vision of that future day when a representative of the Galactic Council visits Earth to make a proposal. Mr. Simak's vision is somewhat different—the visit occurred in the past, and the proposal was made to only one man. The story moves on to the present, via that one man's person, and the curious—not so much alien as alienated—life he has been leading ever since. The Earth is not only not a member of the Galaxy's union, it hasn't even been nominated, doesn't even suspect; it seems heading inevitably towards another major war. Membership in the Galaxy (term used here as a political and not an astronomical conception) might, Enoch Wallace thinks, hopes, provide the only answer. But then two things occur . . . suspicion about Wallace and his ancient old house in the hills of the upper midwest begins to grow on Earth—and the (political) Galaxy itself commences to crack along its seams, a process accelerated, ironically, as a result of what terrestrial suspicion has brought about. Mr. Simak has done quite well in his description of the Wisconsin wilderness where Wallace lives, nature in her various moods almost alone still holding him to his native world; he has done equally well with the relations between Wallace and his alien contacts; suspense is fairly well built up; and if the story's final resolution seems to me both sentimental rather than realistic and not out of necessity (does that make sense to *any*body?), well, that's just how it seems to me. Anyway, not a great book, certainly not a minor classic, but an honest job of work much better than most of what's come out lately. Ronald Fratell has done the cover, and, like the curate's egg, parts of it are very nice.

MR. GEORGE AND OTHER ODD PERSONS, **Stephen Grendon,** Arkham House, $4.00

These stories were "all written

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in one month twenty years ago specifically to swell the log of *Weird Tales,*" says August Derleth (Stephen Grendon) in his introduction, sportingly warning the reader. Who may be certain that the themes will all be tried, if not true, that the element of surprise is close to nil, and that the few almost-successes will be spoiled by major infelicities of style. Considering what *WT* had become, twenty years ago, these tales may well have shone like diamonds on a dung-heap; set by themselves now in one of the always attractive Arkham House volumes, they have the faint, false glitter of rhinestone. Mr. Derleth's descriptions of nature ring true and sweet and it is too bad that he has neither reworked nor allowed to rest in the urn these over-predictable relics of his more juvenile days when he had written a mere fifty or sixty books instead of the current 107. *The Tsanta In The Parlor* contains a genuine passage of shudder —which Mr. D., assuming that his public moves its lips when it reads, promptly allows to go to waste. *The Night Train To Lost Valley* almost makes it, and so does my favorite, *Mrs. Manifold*—but just when the going gets good, in comes old Raw Head and Bloody Bones, gibbering and rattling, and spoiling it all, damn it.—A footnote: Whilst reading this book I heard a noise on the fibre mat of my bedroom floor and, looking down, perceived an enormous and hideous scorpion scuttling across. I pitched the book at it and achieved, I am proud to say, a semi-instantaneous fatality. I cannot therefore consider *Mr. George* a total failure in the realm of things that go Bump in the night.

THE PURPLE CLOUD, **M. P. Shiel,** Paperback Library, 50¢

If M.P. Shiel was the first to use the notion of the-last-man-alive-on-Earth, I do not know. The notion has, as much as any notion in Science Fiction and maybe more than most, been since used—misused—over-used—and infinitely abused. And yet this book is still potent and still grips the reader . . . so, at least, I found, in reading it for the first time, in this edition. In its wealth of detail and rich command of language, it is hard to beat. The basic idea itself is, at this date, nothing: a poisonous cloud of gas circles its way around the globe and kills off the human race; surviving only because he happened to be at the almost-untouched North Pole, is the narrator, a villain if there ever was one. It is not the basic idea but what Shiel does with it which commands admiration, and no review could convey this: the book must be read. It is worthy to be compared to the best of H. G. Wells; thus compared, it comes off the loser—Wells's people are real;

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Shiel's are not; Wells has a genuine and *rational* concern for the human race; Shiel has not. Still, to come behind H. G. Wells and still be in sight of him at all—! I repeat: *the book must be read.*

WHEN EVIL WAKES, August Derleth, ed., Souvenir Press, 21 shillings

This column seldom if ever reviews books printed abroad and for several reasons. We seldom learn of their publication, they are not often easily available to American readers, and it seems more sensible to await publication of an American edition . . . if any. This book, however, was sent to me for review, and so I'll assume that though printed in England it is intended for U.S. publication.

Of the sixteen stories herein, all but three are printed "By permission of Arkham House." Arkham House publishes very diverse material—some of it first-rate, some of it not—and its editions are so small that a selection of good material and in (one hopes) a larger edition would be welcome. This collection reflects the uneven level of Arkham House ingredients. The unquestionably best piece—George Hitchcock's *An Invitation To The Hunt*—is perhaps not SF or F at all. But only perhaps. And a damned good story. Good, though not that good, are Robert Bloch's *Sweets To The Sweet;* H. Russell Wakefield's *The Triumph of Death;* David H. Keller's, *A Piece of Linoleum* (unquestionably neither SF nor F); Joseph Payne Brennan's *Canavan's Back Yard;* and Donald Wandrei's *The Eye And The Finger.* Also here is an insufferably long and tedious thing by John Metcalfe *a la* Henry James, a baffling one by Frank Belknap Long, a not-bad one by Virginia Layefsky, a not-quite by Carl Jacobi, the gibbering and xenophobic *Horror At Red Hook* of H. P. Lovecraft, a dubious Henry S. Whitehead, a Clark Ashton Smith mistake, another "collaboration" of Lovecraft and Derleth—Dunwich, decadence, Whateleys, and what-not—and near-misses by "Stephen Grendon" and "Simon West"—i.e. August Derleth. The Grendon I mention in my review of his *Mr. George;* the West could have been quite good except for the author's habit (I hope not incurable) of dropping in bits of skeletal bones instead of working just a trifle harder on the story instead. There is an effective cover painting by S. R. Boldero.

ANIMAL MIGRATION, Rene Thevenin, Sun Books (Walker), $3.50

This is a translation (by Noel Kenton) of a 1941 French work. It fails to do justice to a fascinating and mysterious subject—but so fascinating and mysterious *is* the subject that even an inadequate

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book is better than none. "Animals" includes insects, birds, and fish. Did everybody but me know that the arresting pattern of river—ocean—river migration and breeding of such fish as salmon and herring corresponds exactly to the full courses of the great drowned rivers of pre-history?—when the Thames flowed into the Rhine and the Rhine emptied into the sea between Scotland and Norway. There is something almost frightening, though I can't say why, in the thought of these mindless creatures still following their way through deltas and estuaries submerged for thousands of years from the light of the sun. Science Fiction has little to match it.

THE BENEFACTOR, **Susan Sontag**, Farrar, Straus, $4.50

A dull, tedious, pretentious book about somebody's dreams. How these things get published is beyond me.

A VOYAGE TO ARCTURUS, **David Lindsay**, Macmillan, $4.95

In the introduction to this latest volume of Macmillan's Library of Science Fiction Classics, anthropologist Loren Eisely entreats our tolerance on the ground that the author "died young"; according to the blurb he was almost seventy at his death in 1945. The plea must therefore on this ground fail, and I can see no other grounds at all. It begins well enough, with a rather old-fashioned flavor like that of decayed cheese, gets off into outer space by a device too absurd to be recapitulated, and promptly stops being a novel and becomes an allegory—and a damned insufferable one, too. The late Frank Lloyd Wright is said to have admired it, and maybe admirers of that frozen-custard factory he bequeathed us on Fifth Avenue will admire it, too.

ALL THE COLORS OF DARKNESS, **Lloyd Biggle, Jr.**, Doubleday, $3.95

Boy, they sure have been turning out the clinkers lately. Lloyd Biggle, Jr., who is capable of writing with perception, has here sold himself short with a plodding, boring SF mystery about teleportation and disappearances. The best thing about the book is its title. Too bad, too bad.

FIFTH PLANET, **Fred Hoyle** and **Geoffrey Hoyle**, Harper, $3.50

Fred Hoyle is the astronomer and novelist; of Geoffrey Hoyle the blurb tells only that he is Fred Hoyle's son. Their first joint venture into fiction is a sort of *When Worlds Collide* (also a collaboration) minus the collision. The planetiferous star Helios, with its train of satellites, is due to pass so

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near our solar system that rocket visitation with one of its satellites is possible. The Americans are interested, so are the Russians. So far, nothing new? Alas, true—and nothing newer, farther on, either. The mechanical background, the astronomical background, seem both to sound authentic; alas, though we are told that the sociological background of the world has changed abundantly—as it should, the story being set a hundred and twenty-odd years from now—it is nevertheless the exact same old world: automobiles, night-clubs, etc. The story, for all its failures of imagination, is not without interest, an interest which should be much, much greater—and would be, if we hadn't seen it all before. Professor Hoyle and his collaborators are obviously capable of writing Science Fiction. They would do well to read more of it. Andrea Foster's jacket design, with its shadowy implication of menace, is very good.

THE ADVENTURES OF TOM BOMBADIL, J.R.R. Tolkien, Houghton Mifflin, $3.50

". . . and other verses from the Red Book," says the subtitle—The Red Book of Westmarch being those chronicles of Middle Earth from which Professor Tolkien, the eminent philologist, has drawn the materials for his quite wonderful books. Readers and lovers of his *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy must be warned that this slender volume of poems (with a pleasant cover by Pauline Baynes, whose interior illustrations I like less) is ostensibly for children. Tom Bombadil is not my favorite Tolkien character, I've found him to be a sort of babbling three-quarters wit, and the poems here about him don't much enchant me. Others, I find quite lovely. My attention was drawn to this book by SPECTRUM, an amateur magazine of Science Fiction book reviews, edited by Mr. Lin Carter—and, as the entrancing verse he selected as exemplum proves to be my favorite, too, I will quote it here:

There was a merry passenger,
a messenger, a mariner:
he built a gilded gondola
to wander in, and had in her
a load of yellow oranges
and porridge for his provender;
he perfumed her with marjoram
and cardamom and lavender

They don't hardly write poetry like that anymore. I wish I had a new "novel" by Tolkien to review—is there anyone who hasn't read *The Hobbit* and the *Rings* trilogy? Go out and begin *at once* this rich and wonderful world; and read slowly—if you can. ◄

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Aberdeen's J. T. McIntosh, author of the memorable ONE IN THREE HUNDRED—ONE IN A THOUSAND series (F&SF, Feb. 1953, Jan. 1954), and of, more recently, THE STUPID GENERAL (Aug. 1962) reports in from Caledonia with a wry tale which demonstrates the difficulties of "communication" between Man, Machine, Alien, Alien, and Woman; or, as Magazine SF's Founding Father H. Gernsback puts it, "Plus ça change . . ."

HUMANOID SACRIFICE

by J. T. McIntosh

"I KNOW IT'S LAUGHABLE," SAID Kni, laughing to prove it, "but these Earthmen get things done."

Two thousand miles away, on another continent of the planet Psit, Bru sneezed sceptically. "With their technological rating, how can they?"

"Well, you see, that's *our* technological rating of *them*. When scientists set a test for artists, how do you reckon the artists are going to rate?"

"You mean Earthmen are artists rather than scientists?"

The line crackled for a moment. Kni paused, surprised. Telephone lines just didn't crackle. However, making no comment, he went on: "Well, their capacities are different from ours, obviously. For instance, one thing that drops our technological rating of them is that when they make something, they make it just good enough and no better. They're restless, impatient, lazy. They don't doublecheck and triplecheck as we do, doing a job once for all time. Once they find something that works, they let it go at that and fix it quite happily when it goes wrong. Only if it goes wrong often and it's a lot of trouble to fix it do they figure out something that isn't going to need so much fixing."

Once again Bru sneezed his doubt. "Slipshod. Careless. That doesn't sound as if your Earthman would be much good to us here in Tfan."

Kni had apparently appointed himself Terran propaganda agent

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on Psit. "It depends what the job is, of course. But you should understand that because of this approach. Earthmen are the best fixers in the galaxy. Well, naturally, they get most practice. Any Earthman working around machines takes it for granted that sooner or later the machine will go wrong and he'll have to repair it. And he's quite confident he'll be able to do it. They're particularly good with robots and calculators—"

"They are?" said Bru, his interest quickening. "How so?"

"I've just been telling you—they're used to fixing things that go wrong, and we're not. Look, when we finish making a machine, we weld or braze or rivet the case over it. We've allowed for minor adjustment, but we don't expect either to have to replace it or repair it. Earthmen fix their covers with screws or nuts and bolts, having every intention of taking it to bits at some time or other—"

He broke off as the line crackled violently. Then he said curiously: "What's the matter? Not weather trouble, surely?"

"As a matter of fact . . . yes," said Bru reluctantly.

This time it was Kni who sneezed incredulously. "Something wrong with AWC in your area? But that's impossible."

"No. Not impossible. You see . . . well . . ."

"No wonder you're desperate."

"Oh, not desperate exactly—"

"But you're clutching at straws. You don't really believe my Earthman could possibly help you, yet you're prepared to let him try. Isn't that it?"

"Yes," said Bru unhappily. He was not enjoying the conversation. Psitians disliked trouble of any kind, and hated admitting a mistake. Although as Tfan area supervisor Bru was not forced, in theory, to discuss his troubles with Kni, Kni certainly rated him and could request a full report and expect to get it.

However, Kni replied quite cheerfully: "Well, I know this Earthman's capabilities, and I'm fairly sure he can straighten things out for you. I'll send him to you."

"Please do," said Bru thankfully. "What's his name?"

"John Smith."

"Peculiar name. Any special way to treat him? Taboos, sensitivities, religious fads?"

"No, I guess not. He'll make allowances for you."

"*He'll* make allowances for *me*!" Bru was uneasily aware that Kni had no high opinion of his intelligence, but this was too much.

"Oh, sure," said Kni airily. "They humor us. All right, then, I'll ask him if he wants to work for you. He will, though—only you've got to be prepared to pay."

"Anything, if he's successful."

"That'll suit him. Earthmen invented the phrase *double or quits*."

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"Just one more thing." Having said this, Bru paused for so long that Kni began to suspect they'd been cut off. At last Bru said: "As a matter of fact . . . there's an Earthman here in Tfan already."

"Is there? I thought John Smith was the only one on this planet."

"Well, you see . . . This Earthman isn't exactly alive. On the other hand, he isn't exactly dead."

"Oh," said Kni meaningly. "One of those."

"Yes. What's bothering me is, how is John Smith likely to react if he finds out about it? I could keep quiet about it, but John Smith will be walking around everywhere and somebody might tell him about this other Earthman. Or he might even wander into the museum and see him."

There was a silence while Kni thought. Finally he said brightly: "Well, that's your problem. Don't hesitate to call me if I can be of any further assistance. Belmurins."

"Belmurins," said Bru uneasily.

John Smith, wearing a pair of shorts, sandals with asbestos soles, and nothing else, stepped out of his capsule into the blazing sunshine of Tfan.

"John Smith?" a willowy robot inquired.

"So I've always been told."

"John Smith?" the robot repeated.

"No other."

"John Smith?"

"Yes," Smith said, weakening.

The robot picked up his single bulging traveling-bag and led him to a car which started automatically. Five minutes later the car stopped and Smith and the robot started to come out.

Smith blinked. It was now raining torrentially and the sky was black. As he watched, the rain turned to hail and then back again. Tfan certainly had a weather problem.

"Canines and felines," he murmured, breaking out a plastic cape.

"I do not understand," said the robot.

"No, why should you?"

In another two minutes Smith was bowing politely to Bru, Tfan area supervisor.

"Calmurins," said Bru doubtfully, looking Smith up and down.

"Calmurins."

Psitians were humanoid (and so they naturally called humans humanoid). They resembled ducks, however, more than they resembled John Smith. Tiny legs and big feet supported fluffy egg-shaped bodies inclined forward like Donald Duck's. Their white downy heads could swivel in all directions. Unlike ducks, they had two strong, useful arms equipped with large six-fingered hands.

They looked as if they laid eggs to reproduce, but they didn't.

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Twelve of them got together, went through some exceedingly complicated, embarrassing and slightly painful maneuvers, and each of them in due course gave birth to a baby Psitian. The pastime was not popular, being considered a social duty and nothing else. Consequently Psitians had the greatest difficulty in understanding that other races actually got fun out of sex.

"We have a problem, Man," said Bru tentatively.

"You don't say."

"I do say. I have just said." He hesitated. His mind wasn't on the weather-control problem at all, but on the Earthman in the museum. The situation could at any moment become very awkward. Now that these Terrans were members of the Federation, with full (or nearly full) Federation rights, there might be a dickens of a row over the fact that there had been a Terran in Tfan museum for hundreds of years, and not even a dead Terran at that.

"To put it briefly, the automatic weather control in this area has gone seriously wrong," said Bru, averting his mental gaze from the other matter with an effort.

"Wrong? Inconceivable. None of your machines ever go wrong."

Psitians were deaf to irony. "That's not quite true, Man. Our weather control lately has been . . ."

He hesitated, and then decided not to take Smith's knowledge of the general situation for granted. It would be best to sketch the background briefly for the Earthman, who could not be expected to know much Psitian history.

"It was a hundred years ago," he said didactically, "that the automatic weather control was installed, Man. It consisted of six electronic coordinators, one for each area, and several million pieces of equipment under the control of the coordinators. Into each coordinator was built the pattern of weather we required. They took over all responsibility for assessing and recording weather conditions on the whole planet, operating and servicing all the required machines, and modifying the weather cycle to conform as nearly as possible with the inbuilt pattern we had supplied."

"Mean temperature, rainfall, wind direction, wind force, seasonal variation?"

"Exactly. To continue, Man, for several years after the installation of the AWC there was no effect on our climate whatever. This was only to be expected: the coordinators were merely collecting and storing information, and experimenting with the various means of weather control we had provided. Some ninety years ago our climate came under increasing control, and by the time AWC had been in operation for twenty-

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five years the installation was an unqualified success."

"What kind of control pattern was set?"

"Smallest possible variation of temperature from day to day. Rainfall principally at night. Seasonal changes gradual and predictable. Wind force never above a certain level. Snow and ice diverted as much as possible to certain sections of each area. Prevention of violent storms, or at least localization of violent storms to certain prescribed areas. Avoidance of extremes. All this was achieved in twenty-five years."

"And what went wrong?"

Recollection of the Earthman in the museum returned. Really, it was impossible to concentrate with such a thing hanging over one. There were no Psitian criminals, as other races understood the word. Psitians as a race were incapable of the necessary deception.

Abruptly Bru said: "Man, we have an Earthman in suspended animation in the museum."

Smith raised his eyebrows. "What's that got to do with the weather?"

"Nothing. I—you don't mind?"

"Look, what are we talking about, the weather or the Earthman in the museum?"

"You don't care about the Earthman in the museum?"

"One thing at a time. Okay, let's talk about the Earthman in the museum. How did he get there, how long has he been there, and why haven't you released him?"

Bru breathed a sigh of relief. John Smith was going to be reasonable, apparently. He was not going to fly into a tantrum and demand an immediate galaxy-wide investigation into the whole affair, as he well might. Some visitors did, on discovering specimens of ther own race in Psitian museums.

"Long before you had space travel, Man," Bru said more easily, "we naturally knew of your existence, as did all the Federation members at that time. But in accordance with Federation law, which you now obey yourselves, no interference is made in the natural development of primitive worlds. Once they have space travel, of course, we have to contact them. Well, this Earthman was picked up and brought here as a specimen some hundred years before you began experimenting with rockets."

Smith whistled. "An Earthman from 1850! Say, you mean this guy's been in suspended animation for more than three hundred years?"

"Yes."

"How was this business squared with Federation law? If it isn't interference to kidnap a living Terran, I don't know what is."

But his voice was calm and

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and his manner undisturbing, Brue breathed still more easily. This Earthman had better self-control than most of the alien visitors to Psit who found members of their own race stuck on cards under glass, so to speak, in a museum. Bru himself had once or twice had reason to wish that past Psitian zoologists had not been quite so industrious in collecting specimens from so many worlds, and had realized that in a few hundred years' time the primitive races concerned might in some cases have been granted full Federation status and rights.

"It's permitted," Bru said, "to pick up specimens who would otherwise be dead anyway. This Earthman was removed from a primitive sailing ship almost in the moment when it foundered."

"I get it. And he hasn't known a thing since that moment three hundred years ago when the ship sank under him?"

"He's been in suspended animation ever since."

"And you could revive him?"

"If you think it desirable."

"Hell, yes. Let's get to it right away. Guess it's going to be quite a shock for the poor guy, but if he had the choice there's no doubt what it would be. He'd opt for life rather than a living death, anywhere, any time. I guess he'll think this is heaven, or the other place . . . Where's the museum?"

"And the matter of the AWC?" Bru said.

Smith shrugged. "It was you who brought up this other affair. Let's dispose of it first, huh?"

"Very well," Bru sighed. Sometimes it was rather a nuisance to possess a conscience. However, he was not sorry he had told John Smith about the Earthman in the museum. Psitians as a race were timid, truthful, responsible; they hated having secrets and having to conceal things which might mean trouble when they came out. The presence of the Earthman in the museum wouldn't have bothered Bru in the slightest so long as there was no chance of any other Earthman visiting Tfan. Once Smith arrived, however, Bru was so anxious about possible trouble that he had very little choice but to blurt out what was on his mind.

A quarter of an hour later they were walking through the halls of the museum—at least, Smith was walking, while Bru puffed and waddled behind him.

"He's here somewhere, I think," Bru gasped. "Yes, over there. Look."

Smith did look, and nearly fell over his feet. He could find only one word to express himself, and he used it.

"Jesus!" he said.

"I didn't know they were bi-

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sexual," Bru said plaintively into the telephone.

"I didn't bother telling you," Kni replied airily. "Does it matter?"

"It matters a great deal," said Bru crossly. "It turned out that John Smith is one kind and the Earthman in the museum is the other. From the moment he saw the specimen, John Smith has been in a kind of daze and I haven't been able to get a meaningful word out of him. He hasn't even let me tell him exactly what the AWC problem is. Are Earthmen always like that when they meet Earthmen of the other kind?"

"I don't know. Nobody does but you. I take it the Earthman in the museum has been successfully revived?"

"Not yet."

"Not yet? I don't understand. Why is John Smith so disorganized if the other Earthman hasn't even been revived yet?"

"That's what I'm asking you," Bru sighed. "Evidently you can't help me."

"Well, nothing like this ever happened on Psit before. Apparently only one Terran sex travels around the galaxy—Smith's, whichever one that is. So none of us have any experience of what happens when two Earthmen of different sexes meet. From what you say, there must be profound emotional disturbance involved?"

"You can take it from me there is. So you can't suggest anything?"

"To make Smith concentrate on your problem? No, I can't. Say, what's wrong with the weather in Tfan anyway? Ours is all right, and if your coordinator failed the others would take over. How can you have weather problems while we—"

"I'm sure the weather aberration is purely local," said Bru cautiously. "I don't think you need worry about it."

"I hope you're right."

Bru hesitated and then said "Belmurins" in farewell. He had meant to ask Kni's opinion of the tactics he was considering adopting with John Smith. But since Kni denied having any special knowledge of Terran social psychology, his opinion could be of no particular value. Besides, if Bru went on talking, Kni's questions about Tfan's weather might become more insistent—and Bru, being probably responsible for what had gone wrong, was uneasy about the whole thing.

Being a Psitian, he was uneasy also about keeping silent. His natural impulse was to blurt out everything, as he had done in the case of John Smith. However, he had been in the actual presence of John Smith and he was not in the actual presence of Kni. That made a difference.

Having received no assistance from Kni, Bru still had to make up

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his mind how to handle John Smith. He was uncomfortably aware he might make another mistake . . .

At least he had Smith's authorization, on behalf of his race, to revive the other Earthman, on the understanding that no retributive action would be taken. That was something.

Smith paced the room like an expectant father. Any moment now the Psitians would come and tell him he could talk to the girl, and in his impatience he found it impossible to stay still. He could and perhaps should have remained with her throughout the whole resuscitation process, but he knew it was a messy business somewhat less glamorous than childbirth. On the whole he was quite prepared to leave that part to the Psitians.

Knowing he was one of about four Terrans within sixty light-years, all of whom were male, Smith had prudently thought as little as possible about women for the last five years. He was twenty-eight, and the last time he had seen a human female had been when he was twenty-three.

There were, of course, compensations in the kind of life he'd been leading, or he'd have returned to Earth long ago. Humanoid races like the Psitians paid fabulously for his services whenever he succeeded in doing what they wanted done, with the result that after this AWC affair, if he should be successful, he could afford to retire from business as a trouble-shooter for aliens and return to Earth physically and financially able to make up for lost time to a startling degree.

Smith had a few magazines and books with him in case he should have an overwhelming desire to remind himself of Earth, and what life among creatures of his own kind was like. But he had grown accustomed to resisting such desires. When you couldn't have a banana split, it was in every way preferable to dismiss the very existence of banana splits from your mind. And if there was anything you wanted much more than a banana split, it was even more desirable to think about something else.

Suddenly seeing this girl (*genus homo*, sex female, name unknown, period *circa* 1850, real age 370 years approximately, apparent age twenty or less) had thrown a whole nest of spanners into John Smith's smoothly-running, perfectly controlled emotional machine.

It wasn't impossible, after all, to have a banana split.

On view in the museum the girl had been dressed in her original clothes, treated to last indefinitely. She wore a slightly hideous black brocade dress, high-necked, long-sleeved, ankle-length, and

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elastic-sided black boots. Consequently Smith had seen only her face, nothing about her figure being apparent except that it was small and slight.

He had found her small, delicate features startingly beautiful, and for a while he had wondered if, like Frederick in *The Pirates of Penzance*, he had grown so unused to girls that the oldest and ugliest of females would look like Venus to him. A quick reference to his magazines, however, had convinced him that this girl's face wouldn't be out of place on the cover of any of them, if she had a new hair-do, was properly made up, and wore something sufficiently low-cut.

Bru waddled in, followed by two black, silent robots who stationed themselves at the door.

"Well?" said Smith sharply. "How is she?"

"I haven't been with the doctors, Man. I know nothing of their progress. It occurred to me that while you're waiting, I might tell you more about our problem."

"I won't even hear you if you do."

"Man, when we first met I thought you were a very reasonable creature, for an alien."

"That was before you told me about this girl. Why did you tell me, anyway? Why didn't you finish one thing before starting another?"

Bru sighed. "I was afraid you would be violently angry. I wanted to dispose of the matter before returning to business. Now I'm beginning to wonder if we're ever going to return to business."

Smith looked at the door behind which Psitian doctors were working on the girl from 1850. "I wonder how that little dark head looks on a pillow," he murmured to himself. "May be a heck of a job trying to find out. After all, the kid's a Victorian. Probably doesn't even know about the birds and the bees . . ."

Bru made up his mind. Turning to the robots, he said firmly: "This Man is not to be allowed to meet the other Earthman until AWC is functioning efficiently again. You will pass this instruction to all robots. Nothing he says and nothing I say is to countermand this order—"

"What the hell?" Smith exploded.

"Please repeat that."

The robot Bru had addressed repeated: "This Man is not to be allowed to meet the other Earthman until AWC is functioning efficiently again. We will pass this instruction to all robots. Nothing he says and nothing you say is to countermand this order."

"Correct," Bru nodded. He turned apologetically to Smith. "I'm sorry, Man. This seemed the only way to—"

Smith had himself under control by this time. It was no use

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losing your temper with humanoids. This only made them think you were unstable.

"Haven't you thought about that poor kid at all?" he demanded. "There's one member of her own race on this world—me—and after keeping her nine-tenths dead for 350 years you're not even going to let her—"

"Man," said Bru patiently, "let us now discuss AWC. The sooner that problem is solved, the sooner you can meet the other Earthman. It's quite simple, is it not?"

Smith breathed deeply. "I don't understand you Psitians. You're so scared I might make trouble that you don't tell me why you sent for me, you blurt out your confession about the girl in the museum. Then . . . Look, suppose I make trouble now? Suppose I report to the Federation that—"

"You can't, Man," said Bru contentedly. "When you signed an authorization on behalf of your race that the Earthman should be revived, you also agreed not to institute any legal proceedings."

Smith stared at him sulfurously for several seconds. Then he said: "Suppose I don't succeed?"

Bru became agitated. "You must succeed. Kni has great confidence in you—"

"That's fine. But if I don't, what happens to that poor girl?"

"Please try," Bru begged.

"Okay," Smith said resignedly. "Talk. Tell me what went wrong with your blasted weather."

Bru sighed his relief. "Seventy-five years ago," he said, "AWC became everything we had hoped it would be when we designed and installed the coordinators—"

"Just a moment. Why six coordinators? Isn't there friction?"

"Not at all, Man. They work together. Their aim is identical. They are interdependent. As I was saying, for a further thirty years the weather was just as we wanted it. Then it became *too* precise."

"Too precise? How do you mean?"

"In those thirty years AWC developed such a stranglehold on the conditions that every day became a blueprint of the last. Every day precisely the same thing happened. At exactly the same time in the early morning, the rain stopped. At exactly the same time in the afternoon there was a light shower. At exactly the same time in the late evening, the rain started again. It became possible to set watches by the weather. There was, of course, seasonal variation, but the change was so slight, so gradual that it was imperceptible from day to day."

"Well, that was fine, wasn't it?"

"Psitians are very susceptible to monotony, Man."

"You should have thought of that before, shouldn't you?"

"Perhaps, but—"

"You wanted minimal varia-

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tion. You got it. That doesn't sound so terrible."

"We know that now, Man. If we could return tomorrow to this rigid weather control we should be delighted to do so."

Smith frowned, and then his face cleared. "I get it. You tampered with AWC, and now it's gone haywire."

"Yes. Fortunately the experiment was made only in this area, and so far the consequences, too, are confined to—"

The door opened and one of the Psitian doctors waddled through. "The Terran will awaken in a few seconds," he told Bru.

Smith took a step toward the door. The two robots moved too. Through the open doorway Smith saw two more robots appear in the passage beyond. Bru's order had been passed on to them by robot radio. Every robot in Tfan would obey the order exactly as if it had been spoken to it directly.

"I'll write her a letter at least," he said resignedly.

"I don't know whether that can be allowed," said Bru.

"It can be," said Smith firmly, "and it will be."

It was.

The letter which was handed to the girl from 1850 ten minutes later—by one of the robots, since Bru's order did not forbid communication—read:

Dear Brunette,

There is so much to explain that I don't know how to begin. Don't be frightened of the funny duck-like creatures. They don't mean you any harm.

The year is 2203 and you're on a world a long, long way from Earth. You'll have to face the fact that nobody you knew is alive and the world you lived in is as dead as they are. Not that there isn't an Earth any more. It's still there and you'll go home soon. But it won't be anything like the world you remember.

Apart from you I'm the only human on Psit. The ducks, who are native Psitians, don't speak English, and for reasons which are far too complicated for me to try to explain, I can't come and see you until I've finished the job I came here to do, a job which has nothing to do with your presence here.

My name is John Smith and I'm 28. I was born in San Francisco, America. I'm just assuming you're American or English, or at least that you understand English.

I'm sending with this a copy of *Current Affairs*. It's the only magazine I've got that hasn't any pictures. I don't want you to see pictures just yet until you've had time to realize how different everything is going to be. You won't make much of

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Current Affairs, but at least it will show you this is no joke.

Please write to me. You can do that, anyway.

Yours,

John Smith.

As soon as Smith had written his letter and given it to one of the silent robots for immediate delivery, Bru continued as if there had been no interruption in his conversation with Smith.

"It seemed to us," said Bru, "that all we had to do was create a slight interference in the communications system of the area coordinator. Thus weather control would be disorganized slightly, and the monotonous precision of the last forty-five years would be disrupted."

"What did you do?"

"We intercepted messages from Psor control station, a hundred miles from here, blotted out the signals, and sent signals of our own."

"Then what happened?"

"The AWC coordinator sent a robot repair unit to Psor, and the station was overhauled. We continued to substitute false signals."

"That wasn't very bright," Smith commented.

"Why not?" said Bru.

"Obviously the coordinator knew that the Psor station was lying. By this time AWC has such control over Psit that the reports of the various stations can be no more than confirmation. The coordinator already knows exactly what they'll report."

"That is true, Man. But we thought . . . Tell me, Man, how is it that with your low technological rating you understand robotic machines so well?"

Smith could have told him, but he didn't. It would be like trying to explain color to a blind man, or music to someone who was deaf.

Few races other than the human race differed greatly in character from individual to individual. For the most part this was an excellent thing. It meant greater agreement than Terrans could ever achieve, for one thing. But it also meant that only Earthmen knew about, and studied, and allowed for, large differences in character within any race.

Every Earthman who had ever lived knew someone who was kind, someone who was cruel, people who were happy, miserable, good, bad, energetic, lazy, selfish, altruistic. Consequently Earthmen could *project*. Earthmen could at least try to think as other humans thought, as non-humans thought, even as machines thought.

So it wasn't surprising that superior races like the Psitians sometimes had to pay Earthmen large sums of money to explain to them the workings of certain machines which the Psitians had provided with some kind of mind of their own.

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"So the area coordinator rebelled," Smith said.

Bru sneezed doubtfully, not liking the word 'rebelled.'

"Well, what the hell else is it?" Smith demanded. "I might rebel because you've deprived me of my banana split. The coordinator rebelled because you started trying to interfere with it."

"Very well," Bru said meekly, "the area coordinator rebelled. Instead of maximum uniformity we have recently had maximum variation, Man. There should be a temperature range of ten degrees —instead it has been ninety. Instead of carefully spaced out rainfall, we have no rain for two weeks and then a cloudburst. I have figures if you'd like to see them—"

"So you'd be delighted if the coordinator would only go back to the maddening monotony of a few months ago?"

"I have already said so, Man."

"I take it the coordinator is the kind of computor which checks itself? Triple components?"

"Quintuple components, Man."

"With its own repair department?"

"It is completely autonomous, Man. Except that if one coordinator failed, the other five would take over and restore the inefficient coordinator to full efficiency."

"And this hasn't happened?" said Smith curiously.

"No."

"Then isn't it obvious that the other five coordinators are fully in agreement about what is going on?"

Bru stared at him in puzzlement and dismay.

Quite a correspondence ensued between Smith and the girl, who turned out, improbably, to be named Henrietta Maugham-Battersby.

She was kept in a small suite of rooms and didn't seem to mind particularly. What she could see of Psit from a window satisfied her for the moment.

The correspondence was handled smoothly by robots. There was no need for addresses. The robots, with their inbuilt intercommunication, almost always knew where Smith was, and there was never any doubt where Henrietta was.

The first letter from her, written in a small, neat hand on cream plastic-paper with a green Psitian stylus, was not handed to Smith until the next morning. It read:

Dear Mr. Smith,

I cannot understand why it is impossible for you to come and see me. Please tell me the truth—I have always been considered a strong-minded female, quite unlikely to have a fit of the vapors because someone calls a spade a spade.

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You are being prevented from coming to me, is this not the truth? When I attempted to come to you, I found that there were certain directions barred to me by the mechanical men. I drew my own conclusions.

If you have journals with pictures in them, I beg of you to let me see them. Naturally I am particularly interested in what is being worn in 2203.

My name is Henrietta Maugham-Battersby and I am, or was 18 years of age. At the time of my last recollections I was on my way from England to India on the sailing-ship *Penelope* to join my father, Colonel Maugham-Battersby of the 53rd Rifles. As you say, he and everyone else I ever knew must be long dead. I have accepted this.

Please inform me of the true situation without delay.

Yours sincerely,
Henrietta Maugham-Battersby.

He dashed off a reply at once, but did not send it until he had some clothes made for her. He expected they would startle her, and when he got her reply much later that day he found he had not been mistaken. The letter ran:

Dear Mr. Smith,

It is inconceivable that an order to the mechanical men by the creature Bru can be as irrevocable as you say. Go to higher authority, Mr. Smith, and have it countermanded. Since the Psitians are in a position of dependence on you, you can obviously exert sufficient pressure to have this done.

Thank you for the garments you have sent me, but it is quite out of the question for me to wear any of them. The pictures in the journals you sent me entirely fail to convince me that any *respectable* young woman, in this or any other age, should be guilty of such immodesty. That it has been possible to find voluptuous females prepared to pose for such pictures is no surprise to me at all—I may tell you that in my own time such lewd pictorial representations were not entirely unknown. What voluptuous females of easy virtue might do was not, however, and is not, any guide to a young lady of decorum and self-respect.

Yours sincerely,
Henrietta Maugham-Battersby.

His third letter did little more than reiterate what he had said already. So did hers. In written communication they had already reached an impasse.

Dear Mr. Smith,

Please do not make any further attempt to convince me. I was not, as the saying is, born

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yesterday. You are obviously trying to take advantage of a presumably helpless female. I am neither as helpless nor as gullible as you seem to think.

I shall wait until contact with respectable present-day society has enabled me to determine what is, and what is not, done in this day and age. Until then I shall act according to my own standards of modesty and morality.

Although you have forfeited my trust, I must, of course, continue to rely on you for assistance in returning to my own home—my own world, as you put it. Please arrange a meeting without delay.

Yours sincerely,
Henrietta Maugham Battersby.

Having received this, Smith decided there were not going to be any more letters. The personal touch was needed.

It had been surprisingly difficult to obtain the exact specifications of the AWC coordinators' original instructions. Bafflingly, Bru had not even thought of checking what Smith, or any other Terran technician, considered most obvious.

The coordinators had been given control of Psit's weather. But before a machine would do anything, it had to be given not merely the power to do it but also a motive for doing it. A weather control coordinator had to *want* to control weather. The built-in directives must contain the explanation for AWC's conduct since Bru interfered with it.

Having found the directives at last in the local library, Smith considered them carefully and then sought out Bru.

"I want to see Henrietta," he said firmly.

"You know that is impossible, Man."

Smith shook his head. "Oddly enough, it was she who saw how to break down your order. Or at least how to go about it. There's a pointer in that, Bru. I wouldn't be surprised if she had some useful ideas about your AWC problem as well."

Bru sneezed. "That is ridiculous, Man. At the time when the Henrietta-Man was removed from your planet, your ancestors were only at the steam-engine stage of development."

"And do you know what kind of stage that is? No, you don't, because it happened so long ago on Psit that you've forgotten all about it. It's the stage when everything works, Bru. It's the stage of expansion, of certainty, of supreme confidence. *God's in his heaven and all's right with the world.* It's the stage of common-sense."

Bru didn't say anything. He couldn't, having no clear idea of what Smith was talking about.

"We accept a situation," Smith

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said patiently. "By 'we' I mean you and me, though I'm not as ready to accept things as you are. We know that a certain job is going to mean a lot of time and trouble with the tools and components available, and even more time and trouble if we make new tools and components—so we don't do it. The men and women of 1850 went right ahead and did the job somehow, and if it wasn't a success they did it again. In 1850 my own city, San Francisco, was being built of wood. When it burned down it was rebuilt in steel, brick and reinforced concrete . . ."

Bru began to see a faint glimmer of light. Kni had told him that Earthmen were good at repair jobs because, unlike Psitians, they were temperamentally at home with the idea of repair. Apparently what Smith was saying was that this predisposition in favor of repair or replacement rather than adjustment and readjustment had been stronger in 1850 than it was in 2203, even among Earthmen.

"Do you know how to restore AWC to its former efficiency?" Bru asked directly.

Smith replied: "After Henrietta and I have had a little chat, I'll tell you."

"You're not seriously telling me that you need the Henrietta-Man's assistance?"

"No," said Smith. "Not seriously. Probably she'd come up with the same general answer as I do, but I'd still have to translate it into practical terms. And yet she helped, Bru. It was her idea to 'go to higher authority' to get your order to robots canceled."

"Higher authority?"

"Kni. He's not your boss exactly, but he rates you and the robots know all about that. He only has to tell his robots to tell your robots that I'm to be allowed to see Henrietta. Probably the robots will check with you because they think that way, but when you confirm that Kni's directive overrides yours—"

Bru became agitated. "I do not wish to apply to Kni, Man."

"You have to. As Henrietta also said, I can obviously exert sufficient pressure to have this done. If you want your coordinator put right, get on the line to Kni."

"If I do, can you make any guarantee that—"

"No. No guarantees, Bru. That's where your race and mine differ. You make things and expect them to work, and to give you your due, they usually do. We try something to see if it works."

"But you have a plan?"

"Oh, sure. Your AWC coordinator is built to work on the principle that weather control is the only thing that matters and that weather control means averaging out all extremes."

"That's a very loose way of putting it."

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"True. The coordinator also knows that it was built by an organic race which is sensitive to climatic changes and wants them to be as smooth as possible."

"That's even more loose."

"But no less true." Smith grinned suddenly. "You now have everything necessary to understand exactly what's happened and what to do about it. Now I want to see Henrietta."

The blankness of Bru's gaze showed that he was going to see Henrietta.

Smith took Henrietta out for a walk. He had put on slacks and a white shirt. She was in her black brocade dress.

The temperature was slightly over a hundred.

The complexities of the city seemed to hurt her eyes. She was clearly relieved when he led her away from it into fields where the grass, though thick and yellowish, was undeniably grass of a sort, and the bushes, though purple and capable of slow locomotion, looked not unlike bushes.

"I hope you understand, Mr. Smith," she said composedly, "that my apparent acceptance of the situation does not imply acceptance of other things you no doubt have in mind."

"What," he asked innocently, "do you think I have in mind?"

She turned her nose in the air, blushed, and said nothing.

"You might as well face the fact," he said, "that it'll be at least three months before you meet other human beings. And six months before you get back to Earth."

"What I wrote to you still applies," she said coolly. "I'm not going to take what you say as any guide to present-day conduct, Mr. Smith. When we meet other . . . Terrans, as you call them, I shall have an opportunity of judging . . ."

She stopped, because it suddenly began to rain heavily. In a few seconds the rain changed to hail.

They started to run for the one tree in sight, the only shelter within reasonable distance. Henrietta, hampered by her long skirts, could not run very well. Without ceremony Smith lifted her and carried her.

When he set her down in the shelter of the tree, she said breathlessly: "Thank you, Mr. Smith. But you might have asked me whether I wished to be—"

"You're wet through as it is. Lucky I had some clothes made for you. You'll be able to change when we get back."

"Never, Mr. Smith. I have already told you . . ." Curiosity got the better of her. "Did you actually make those garments yourself?"

"With the help of a textile robot, yes."

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"The mechanical men can do things like that?"

"Robots can do far more than just make clothes, Henrietta. They can—"

"Mr. Smith, I have not yet given you permission to call me Henrietta."

"It's all right, thanks, I don't need it. As I was saying, Henrietta, robots can do far more than that. An electronic coordinator controls the weather here."

"It seems to be making a singularly poor job of it," she said tartly.

"That's why I'm here. To fix it. I don't think that'll present much of a problem. Then we can be on our way. The next ship in the general direction of Earth—I've already checked on it—leaves in three weeks' time and it'll be manned by Picors, who are rather like crocodiles with heads like sheep. It's possible, but very unlikely, that there'll be other humans on board. From Pica we'll be able to get a tender to New Italia, another planet in the same system and a Terran colony. You'll meet humans there and there's a regular service to Earth."

"And it'll take three months to reach New Italia?"

He nodded. "Look, the hail has stopped. Want to go right back?"

"Yes, please. Until you repair the weather machine I do not think I shall go for any more walks in the country."

They turned back to the city.

"You don't feel any resentment against the Psitians?" Smith asked. "For pulling you off that sailing ship and bringing you here, I mean?"

"It would be pointless to do so. I understand I'd have died otherwise. And it will certainly be interesting to see what changes have occurred in 350 years."

"Even if you don't believe anything anybody tells you?"

"I have said all that has to be said on that subject, Mr. Smith."

Bru waddled behind them, puffing. "Why could we not come here by car?" he asked plaintively.

"Because I don't want the robots to know what's going on," said Smith. "Just on general principles."

They stopped. Henrietta, in her black dress, still looked to Smith rather like an intriguing parcel marked NOT TO BE OPENED UNTIL CHRISTMAS—IF THEN.

For several seconds they watched silently. They were at the delivery yard where the raw materials for AWC were supplied. The huge building which housed the main Tfan AWC depot and the area coordinator was a quarter of a mile away. In front of it were stacks of steel bars, plate glass, cement bags, and other raw materials which AWC used. Small chuckling robotrucks ran about, unhur-

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riedly carrying the materials into the building.

"It doesn't matter where the stuff is stacked?" Smith said.

"No. The robotrucks have a limited capacity for analysis. The AWC plant takes what it wants."

"But lately it hasn't been taking much?"

"On the contrary," Bru said, "the intake has been unusually heavy. Does that affect your conclusions?"

"Not really. If the intake here stopped altogether, the coordinator could get anything it needed from the other AWC depots."

Henrietta paid no attention to the conversation, being unable to speak Psitian. She watched the busy robotrucks with mild curiosity. She had had the sense to realize that for quite a while she would have to observe things without trying too hard to understand them.

"Yesterday," Smith said, "I asked Henrietta what to do about the coordinator. She said the machine was punishing you for interfering with it. And that to put it right you'd have to show it that the criminal had been caught and punished. That's you, Bru."

Bru said: "That is nonsense, Man."

Smith sighed. "Machines are simple, Bru. AWC's sole reason for existing is to record and control the weather. You started interfering with its operation. This area coordinator then reached a simple, predictable conclusion. It must be the organic race which had built it which was now interfering with its efficiency. The coordinator then set out to kill every Psitian in this area."

"Kill us!" Bru went into a paroxysm of sneezing.

"It's no use refusing to believe it. A machine doesn't care who built it. The AWC coordinator is autonomous. Any implied loyalty to the Psitians is subordinate to the necessity for rigid weather control. The coordinator, knowing you were attacking its prime function, decided to try to kill you. Then, when all the Psitians in this area were dead, it could control the weather to its heart's content."

"Weather variation doesn't kill us."

"No, but the coordinator doesn't know that. You built into it the absolute necessity of ensuring minimal climatic variation, on a long-term basis. When you started interfering, it thought: 'The Psitians are now my enemies. In order to attain long-term control, I must kill the Psitians. At the moment it seems necessary to act only in this area, because only in this area has there been interference.' It communicated with the other coordinators, which of course came to the same conclusion. They are waiting to see what happens."

Bru wasn't sneezing any more.

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"There seems a possibility, Man, that you may be right."

"Of course I'm right. A Psitian or an Earthman whose job is, say, assembling grass-cutting machines realizes that other things may be more important than grass-cutting machines—food and drink and warmth, for instance. A robot built for one specific job recognizes nothing else. You'd expect the AWC coordinator to get on with its job in the face of difficulties caused by a horde of termites, say. Well, to the coordinators you're nothing more than termites. If you leave it alone, it'll leave you alone. If not—"

"The remedy?" Bru said anxiously. "There is a remedy?"

"Well, first, never interfere with AWC again. Put up with the monotony. That's built into the coordinator. That's what it wants."

"Yes, yes. But to restore it?"

"Give the coordinator a human sacrifice."

"What!"

"Humanoid, we'd say. A humanoid sacrifice. This is the coordinator's only intake, the only way of communicating with it except for the weather signs it collects. And since it decides what to collect for itself, that's no way to influence it. Not giving it any stores might in the end convince it that all the Psitians in Tfan were dead. A better, quicker way is to show it that its measures have been successful."

"How?"

"Give it dead bodies. It can analyze. It will know what they are. The coordinator isn't a pathologist. It won't know how or why the bodies died. Fortunately, you Psitians don't care what happens to your bodies when you're dead . . . Collect all the dead bodies in Tfan for a week and bring them here."

"That could be done. You really think . . .?"

"The coordinator hasn't the slightest idea how many Psitians there are. It *wants* to return to minimal variation the moment it can. It knows that for reasons which seemed excellent, it tried to kill off the organic population of Tfan. It shouldn't be difficult to convince it that it has succeeded."

"What are you talking about all this time, Mr. Smith?" Henrietta asked.

"Only the weather," said Smith.

"So you solved Bru's little problem," Kni said. "Good. I thought you would. Bru is not a very clever person."

"No," Smith agreed. "You Psitians differ less in character than most other races. But there are always differences in intelligence and imagination."

Kni was no longer interested in Bru. "I arranged two passages on the Picor ship as you requested. You will be delighted to learn that there are two other Earthmen

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already traveling on the ship."

"Oh?" said Smith. He was not as delighted as Kni assumed. He had been confident that in three months alone with Henrietta he would be able to change her mind on most things. The company of two other Earthmen was for once the last thing he wanted.

"Yes. Your friend the other Earthman has already met them, no doubt."

If Smith had known of their existence, he would not have let Henrietta go on ahead to the ship while he had his final interview with Kni. There were quite a few formalities concerning the transfer of Smith's formidable bank balance to Earth, and it was over an hour before he was able to go to the spaceport.

It was very unlikely that he would ever see Psit or Kni again.

Smith was hurrying out to the Picor ship when Henrietta came running to meet him. He stopped and stared. She was wearing a flamboyant green dress which showed beyond any doubt that it had been worth waiting until the intriguing parcel was opened.

"I've met the two Terrans," she said breathlessly. "I'm sorry for doubting you. You've been very patient with me . . . it's obvious now you were telling me the exact truth all along."

"Huh?"

"They seem nice people. The girl has been telling me a lot."

Smith met the "two Earthmen," whom Henrietta was going to take as a model, a few minutes later. The young woman of the two greeted him with a complacent smile. "How do you do?" she said, dreamily. The young man said, "Our name is Gordon. We—" he blushed, grinned fatuously. "We're on an extended honeymoon trip," he said.

THE SHORTEST SCIENCE FICTION LOVE STORY EVER WRITTEN

Boy meets girl.
Boy loses girl.
Boy builds girl.

—JEFFREY RENNER

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Success has not spoiled Rock, er, Robert Bloch; he has not lost the common touch—although rumors to the effect that he invented it are, perhaps, exaggerated. In order, therefore, to convert into a triad the duet of articles which he wrote for us about aspects of Science Fiction fandom in times past, it was needful only for us to obtain the services of a comely grisette. She smiled, she plied him with potables, she put the question to him . . . and a mere eight months later the subappended monograph appeared. It is one of three on the subject of that singular microcosm peculiar to our particular literary genre; and will be, we are sure, at least as interesting to the majority of readers who do not form a part of it as to the minority who do. Part of the phenomena of SF fandom is its conventions—the part Bob Bloch writes about here. It was at one such that we were politely accosted by (as his card revealed) a Corporation Man in hotel uniform of dark suit, white shirt, Sincere tie, who politely inquired of us what was going on. We told him. "Science Fiction . . ." he said, musingly. Then, still not quite clear, but nonetheless impressed, he said, "You don't know how unusual it is to see a group of people who are so obviously interested in and so obviously enjoying *what they are doing!" Let Mr. Bloch show you why.*

THE CONVENTIONAL APPROACH

by Robert Bloch

THE FIRST CONVENTION IN THE United States was held in Philadelphia during the month of May, 1787. Contrary to popular rumor, I did not attend (I seldom go anywhere in May) and according to reports I didn't miss much.

There were only 55 people present. I understand they spent most of their time just sitting around and yakking about a Constitution or some such nonsense.

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Oh, I guess they did have a masquerade ball—I've seen pictures of the affair and almost everybody was wearing ridiculous costumes, with wigs and knee-breeches—but the whole thing looks like a drag to me. I mean, with only 55 attendees, how could they possibly break even on the deal? I'm sure they lost money, and the proof of it is that they've never held another Constitutional Convention since.

Science Fiction Conventions, on the other hand, are a howling success; 21 of them have been held in the past 24 years, and most of them have made a buck. Which only goes to prove the superiority of free enterprise as opposed to governmental interference, my friends, and if I am elected—

But we're getting ahead of our story, if any.

Science fiction, as we know it, was a minor snarl in the Roaring Twenties—a decade which witnessed the rise of such notables as Pretty-Boy Floyd, Legs Diamond, Dutch Schultz, Frank Nitti, Alphonse Capone and Hugo Gernsback. It was Gernsback who, in 1926, produced the first "scientifiction" magazine, *Amazing Stories*. Not only did readers find his publication; they also found its letter-column, and through the letter-column, one another. "Fans" of this sort of fiction were soon exchanging views and opinions, collecting artwork and hardcover books in the *genre*, and reading the other magazines which came into the field during the next half-dozen years.

Without going into morbid details on the subject, which I have covered at length elsewhere in my monumental historical survey (*The Decline of the North, South, East and West*, pub. by Stealth, 1958) it is sufficient to note that a science fiction fandom came into being. Teen-agers in particular flocked to the field. In some of the larger communities—notably New York, Philadelphia, Chicago and Los Angeles—informal "clubs" sprang up, with regular meetings and meeting-places. The coming of the Thirties saw the advent of the "fanzine," an amateur publication devoted to various aspects of the science fiction field. These efforts multiplied during the Depression Decade, circulating amongst the readers through subscriptions and mailing-lists and spreading interest to an increasing number of fans. The artificial *apartheid* between professional editors, writers and readers was breached as early as 1933, when a 17-year-old fan magazine publisher graduated to the editorship of the professional science fiction magazine, *Wonder Stories*. In the following years, many fans, whose first editorial or auctorial efforts appeared in the amateur press, "crossed over" to commercial markets. When teen-age fanzine publishers like Jerry Siegel and Joe

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Shuster could soar to success on the sturdy back of their creation, *Superman,* there was incentive for others to pursue fantasy and science fiction with more than the casual interest of the average reader of western or mystery stories.

There were other factors, too, which contributed to the development of fandom as a permanent in-group. The Depression itself (if you wonder why I capitalize it, it's because you didn't live through it) was a nightmare for penniless adolescents. In fandom they could achieve almost instant identity and status as publishers, editors, writers, artists, correspondents, critics, club-members and club-leaders. They created their own historical frame of reference, coined neologisms, revelled in running gags and hoaxes, enjoyed acceptance by their peers. Moreover, since many fans had "turned pro," it was possible for the reader to form an acquaintanceship or even an enduring friendship with some of the professionals whose work he admired. In the major cities these professionals often attended the club meetings. It was heady stuff for a teen-ager to rub elbows with one of the "alltime greats" in the field and be treated as a fellow-fan by an elderly author in his thirties.

In such an atmosphere, the Science Fiction Convention was conceived. After some faltering experimental preliminaries on the local level, the concept of the "World Science Fiction Convention" became a reality, and the infant idea first saw the light of day on July 2nd, 1939, in New York City. Here, in the modest confines of Caravan Hall, a meeting-room in a midtown office building, some 200-odd (plus a few very odd) fans and professionals convened under the chairmanship of one Samuel Moskowitz, a name not altogether unknown to science fiction circles, or even squares.

All was not sweetness and light —there had been bitter feuding between various factions of fandom regarding the staging of the event, and disaffected elements appeared to upset the decorum of the meeting. Nor, judged by contemporary standards, was the Convention itself comparable to such later galas as the Yalta Conference or the historic meeting between Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton.

But two hundred people *did* attend, coming from such vast distances (by teen-age, 1939 standards) as Chicago, Los Angeles and Far Rockaway; though not truly a "world" Convention, the affair attracted many professional publishers, editors, writers and artists in the field. Guest of Honor was artist Frank R. Paul, who spoke in a somewhat dingy room decorated with original cover-paintings for science fiction magazines. There were many special fan publica-

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tions distributed to attendees, and for the first time fan-correspondents of years' standing had a chance to sit down together. The second day was devoted to a program on the sciences and the highlight of the third was a baseball game and a mass trek to the nearby World's Fair. But several Convention "traditions" had been established.

First and foremost, a portion of the expenses were defrayed by means of an auction—artwork, manuscripts and magazines donated by professional publishers in the field were sold to the highest bidder. Since many fans were, and are, avid collectors, this practise has resulted in a considerable source of revenue to the amateur organizations staging a Convention.

The second tradition centers around the entertainment, which has since followed the general pattern laid down by New York in 1939—an address of welcome, introduction of the famous and infamous, speeches by notables, a scheduled program and a Convention Banquet.

Again, by today's standards, there was nothing earth-croggling about the program. The principal entertainment was a showing of the old silent UFA film, *Metropolis*, which didn't offer nearly as many weird effects as the fannish baseball game the following day. The Banquet cost the enormous sum of $1 per plate—and the best evidence that this was indeed a Depression affair consists of the fact that only 32 people felt they could afford to attend.

Both *Time* and *The New Yorker* published accounts of the affair, and sniggered sophisticatedly over the "Buck Rogers" atmosphere. But their recognition, however disdainful and distasteful, nailed down one thing; science fiction fandom was a national phenomenon, of national interest.

Once established, the World Science Fiction Convention became an annual event. The second was held in Chicago, the third in Denver. There was a hiatus during the war years, but in 1946 the affairs were resumed and have continued on a once-a-year basis.

What are Science Fiction Conventions *really* like? All I can do is cite a few of my own impressions, based on attendance at eleven of these gatherings from '46 through '62.

The 1946 Convention was held, kicking and screaming, in Los Angeles at a hall called the Park View Manor, so-called because it overlooked MacArthur Park, a spot well worth overlooking under any circumstances. The attendance was small; 125 people and Forrest J. Ackerman, who collapsed before my arrival and took to his bed. The rest of us stayed up to listen to A. E. van Vogt and E. Mayne Hull, to attend a Masquer-

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ade Ball which has since become an important feature of every subsequent Convention and to engage in the casual *camaradie* which is perhaps the most attractive feature of these get-togethers for fans and pros alike. I shared the podium at the Banquet with Ray Bradbury and Leigh Brackett, among others, and for the first time in my own career as a fan and as a professional writer, met a sizeable group of fellow-readers and fellow-chirospastics.

It was all so enjoyable that I needed two years in which to recover, but in 1948 I flew to Toronto as Guest of Honor, along with Bob Tucker. Again attendance was small, the program informal, the setting modest. But we *were* in Canada; Conventions had already begun to take on a truly international aspect, and fans in London were beginning their annual gatherings. And a general procedure was being crystallized; each year fan-groups from various cities would attend and make a bid for their community as the following year's Convention-site. Conventions were financed by a small membership fee ($1 then, $3 today) plus proceeds from the auctions.

The following two years I devoted to my hobby (raising pedigreed vultures) but in 1951 I was off to New Orleans. By now, Conventions were being held in official hotels, complete with meeting-halls, Banquet-room facilities, bars, smoke-filled rooms and other indispensable adjuncts including non-functioning elevators and unavailable room-service. Also the date had been advanced to Labor Day Weekend, in recognition of the fact that many fans were no longer teen-agers who hitch-hiked to the "Con" but full-grown, responsible (and irresponsible) adults who had to reckon with regular working-schedules. Highlight of the New Orleans program was the introduction of two brand-new science fiction movies, *The Day The Earth Stood Still* and *When Worlds Collide,* both of which were specially previewed for the Convention audience alone; in the case of the former, the producers rented the largest theatre in town for the occasion. Science Fiction Conventions were graduating to the Big Time, and the local press-coverage no longer waxed facetious about kids in propeller-beanies waving zap-guns.

As a matter of fact, there was a boom in the field, both in magazines and book-publication, and in Chicago, in 1952, the echoes resounded through the Morrison Hotel, where more than 1,000 attendees assembled for a dazzling affair. Somehow I got trapped into serving as Toastmaster at the Banquet, which allowed me the pleasure of introducing Guest of Honor Hugo Gernsback, the man who—in a large measure—was responsi-

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ble for it all. I was also privileged to hear science expert Willy Ley assert that he'd never seen a flying saucer, and to remedy that lack by letting fly with a saucer at him.

The turnout of notable fans and professionals was impressive, the program (which included the first science fiction ballet) exciting, and the four-day nonstop schedule of parties beggared description—to say nothing of some of the hosts. From '52, World Science Fiction Conventions became truly impressive events, calling for tremendous effort and dedication on the part of the fan-groups sponsoring them. and requiring the services of many people to provide stimulating program-fare. Also inaugurated were a series of annual awards for the year's "best" in the field—novel, short story, artist, magazine, dramatic presentation, fan-magazine, etc.—affectionately dubbed "Hugos" in honor of Gernsback. I have one of these trophies on my desk; it's an impressive piece with a gold plaque set in a wooden base, from which rises what is either a silver rocket or an elephant's suppository, I'm not quite sure which. But I'm proud of it, and the E. E. Evans Memorial Award which has also been bestowed in recent years. Along with the awards has come another annual institution—the Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund which, by popular subscription, alternately brings a British fan to an American Convention or sends an American fan to the British gathering.

In 1953 I went to the Convention in Philadelphia; in '54 it was San Francisco, and in '55, Cleveland. 1956 brought the Convention back to New York again, and in 1957 it became a true "World" affair in London—with over 50 American fans chartering a plane and flying across to attend. I didn't make the scene, being busy with my new hobby (necrophilism) but I was in Los Angeles in '58 and Detroit in '59. During the next two years I was occupied with a small entertainment project (geeking canaries) but 1962 found me in Chicago, and subsequently in an iron lung after the lavish hospitality. Conventions have enabled me to hurl insults as a speaker and Toastmaster, participate in panel discussions and playlets, witness the premiere of the world's first science fiction opera, see rare films, attend the fabulous art shows which are now a regular annual feature, buy special *memorabilia* at auctions, ogle the chicks at the Masquerade Balls and "Fashions of the Future" style-shows, hear first-rate talks by first-rate scientists, meet fans and publishers and artists and editors and fellow-writers from all over the world, catch a glimpse of many cities I might not otherwise have visited, and—above all—enjoy the stimulating company of people who share kindred interests in one of the world's

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most unusual and engrossing hobbies. (No, I'm not talking about sex: I understand that its inventor, Isaac Asimov, plans to cover this subject in a forthcoming issue.)

Thanks to Conventions, I've found lifelong friends; many of them people I only see once every few years, but with whom—when we meet again, three thousand miles away from our last encounter—I can pick up a conversation in mid-sentence and continue as though we had only been momentarily interrupted.

This is not an isolated, subjective reaction; witness the fact that, in addition to the World Conventions, there have been a continuing series of regional gatherings for many years—the ESFA and Philadelphia Conferences and Lunacons in the East, the annual Midwescon in Cincinnati, the Westercons on the Pacific Coast. Some fortunate fans who started attendance in their teens continue to appear in their forties, and such redoubtable professionals as Anthony Boucher and E. E. Smith, Ph.d. have declared and demonstrated that the dream of their lives is to move on from one Convention to another in a continuing euphoria of tape-recording, flashbulb popping, autograph parties, interview sessions, and relaxed conviviality.

Actually, as I've stated before in the past (I only state before in the future when writing a time-traveling story) the Convention is a miniature world of make-believe all its own; a three-ring circus that comes to a different town for a three-day stand just once a year, not for profit but for pleasure and participation. There's nothing comparable to the unique quality of the Science Fiction Conventions, and I guess that's why I like them—they're so unconventional.

CONVENTION NOTE

The next World Science Fiction Convention will be held on Labor Day weekend in Oakland, California. Membership fee for attendees is $3.00. Address: Pacificon II, P. O. Box 261, Fairmont Station, El Cerrito, California.

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Not the least curious—but perhaps the most overlooked—thing about the Wandering Jew is that he was obviously not a Jew at all, but, as his name (a name no Jew has ever borne or would ever bear) indicates, a Persian. What brought him to Jerusalem or what prompted him, on that misfortunate day, to speak the taunting words (in one version of them), Go—why dost thou tarry?, *we must leave to students of the strange and copious legend . . . legend which, Heaven knows, in times past, formed part of the very fabric of Jew-hatred. Not so, however, in Mr. Ballard's haunting story, which will, we wager, cause you to look more closely at many an Old Master. And perhaps at a very few New ones.*

THE LOST LEONARDO

by J. G. Ballard

THE DISAPPEARANCE—OR, TO put it less euphemistically—the theft of the *Crucifixion* by Leonardo da Vinci from the Museum of the Louvre in Paris, discovered on the morning of April 19, 1965, caused a scandal of unprecedented proportions. A decade of major art thefts, such as those of Goya's *Duke of Wellington* from the National Gallery, London, and collections of impressionists from the homes of millionaires in the South of France and California, as well as the obviously inflated prices paid in the auction rooms of Bond Street and the Rue de Rivoli, might have been expected to accustom the general public to the loss of yet another over-publicised masterpiece, but in fact the news of its disappearance was received by the world with genuine consternation and outrage. From all over the globe thousands of telegrams poured in daily at the Quai d'Orsay and the Louvre, the French consulates at Bogata and Guatemala City were stoned, and the panache and finesse of press attachés at every embassy from Buenos Aires to Bangkok were strained to their not inconsiderable limits.

I myself reached Paris over twenty-four hours after what was being called 'the great Leonardo scandal' had taken place, and the

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atmosphere of bewilderment and indignation was palpable. All the way from Orly Airport the newspaper headlines on the kiosks blazoned the same story.

As the Continental Daily Mail put it succinctly:

LEONARDO'S CRUCIFIXION STOLEN
£5 Million Masterpiece Vanishes from Louvre

Official Paris, by all accounts, was in uproar. The hapless director of the Louvre had been recalled from a UNESCO conference in Brasilia and was now on the carpet at the Elysée Palace, reporting personally to the President, the Deuxième Bureau had been alerted, and at least three ministers without portfolio had been appointed, their political futures staked to the recovery of the painting. As the President himself had remarked at his press conference the previous afternoon, the theft of a Leonardo was an affair not only for France, but for the entire world, and in a passionate plea he enjoined everyone to help effect its speedy return (despite the emotionally charged atmosphere, cynical observers noticed that this was the first crisis of his career when the Great Man did not conclude his peroration with 'Viva La France').

My own feelings, despite my professional involvement with the fine arts—I was, and am, a director of Northeby's, the world-famous Bond Street auctioneers—by and large coincided with those of the general public. As the taxi passed the Tuileries Gardens I looked out at the crude half-tone illustrations of da Vinci's effulgent masterpiece reproduced in the newspapers, recalling the immense splendour of the painting, with its unparalleled composition and handling of chiaroscura, its unsurpassed technique, which together had launched the High Renaissance and provided a beacon for the sculptors, painters and architects of the Baroque.

Despite the two million reproductions of the painting sold each year, not to mention the countless pastiches and inferior imitations, the subject matter of the painting still retained its majestic power. Completed two years after da Vinci's *Virgin and St. Anne,* also in the Louvre, it was not only one of the few Leonardos to have survived intact the thousand eager hands of the retouchers of four centuries, but was the only painting by the master, apart from the dissolving and barely visible *Last Supper,* in which he had handled a composition with a large landscape and a huge gallery of supporting figures.

It was this latter factor, perhaps, which gave the painting its terrifying, hallucinatory power. The enigmatic, almost ambivalent

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expression on the face of the dying Christ, the hooded serpentine eyes of the Madonna and Magdalene, these characteristic signatures of Leonardo became more than mere mannerisms when set against the huge spiral concourse of attendant figures that seemed to swirl up into the distant sky across the Place of Bones, transforming the whole image of the crucifixion into an apocalyptic vision of the resurrection and judgment of mankind. From this single canvas had come the great frescoes of Michelangelo and Raphael in the Sistine Chapel, the entire schools of Tintoretto and Veronese. That someone should have the audacity to steal it was a tragic comment on mankind's respect for its greatest monuments.

And yet, I wondered as we arrived at the offices of Galleries Normande et Cie in the Madeleine, had the painting really been stolen at all? Its size, some 15 feet by 18 feet, and weight—it had been transferred from the original canvas to an oak panel—precluded a single fanatic or psychopath, and no gang of professional art thieves would waste their time stealing a painting for which there would be no market. Could it be, perhaps, that the French government was hoping to distract attention from some other impending event, though nothing less than the re-introduction of the monarchy and the coronation of the Bourbon Pretender in Notre Dame would have required such an elaborate smoke-screen.

At the first opportunity I raised my doubts with Georg de Stael, the director of Galleries Normande with whom I was staying during my visit. Ostensibly I had come to Paris to attend a conference that afternoon of art dealers and gallery directors who had also suffered from thefts of major works of art, but to any outsider our mood of elation and high spirits would have suggested some other motive. This, of course, would have been correct. Whenever a large stone is cast into the turbid waters of international art, people such as myself and Georg de Stael immediately take up our positions on the bank, watching for any unusual ripple or malodorous bubble. Without doubt the theft of the Leonardo would reveal a good deal more than the identity of some crack-pot cat burglar. All the darker fish would now be swimming frantically for cover, and a salutary blow had been struck at our official establishment.

Such feelings of revenge obviously animated Georg de Stael as he moved with dapper, light-footed ease around his desk to greet me. His blue silk summer suit, well in advance of the season, glittered like his smooth brilliantined hair, his svelte rapacious features breaking into a smile of roguish charm.

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"My dear Charles, I assure you, categorically, the confounded picture has actually gone—" Georg shot out three inches of elegant chalk-blue cuff and snapped his hands together "—puff! For once everyone is speaking the truth. What is even more remarkable, the painting was genuine."

"I don't know whether I'm glad to hear that or not," I admitted. "But it's certainly more than you can say for most of the Louvre—and the National Gallery."

"Agreed." Georg straddled his desk, his patent leather shoes twinkling in the light. "I had hoped that this catastrophe might induce the authorities to make a clean breast of some of their so-called treasures, in an attempt, as it were, to dispel some of the magic surrounding the Leonardo. But they are in a complete fuddle."

For a moment we both contemplated what such a sequence of admissions would do to the art markets of the world—the price of anything even remotely genuine would soar—as well as to the popular image of Renaissance painting as something sacrosanct and unparalleled. However, this was not to gainsay the genius of the stolen Leonardo.

"Tell me, George," I asked, "Who stole it?" I assumed he knew.

For the first time in many years Georg seemed at a loss for an answer. He shrugged helplessly. "My dear Charles, I just do not know. It's a complete mystery. Everyone is as baffled as you are."

"In that case it must be an inside job."

"Definitely not. The present crowd at the Louvre are beyond reproach." He tapped the telephone. "This morning I was speaking to some of our more dubious contacts—Antweiler in Messina and Kokoschka in Beirut—and they are both mystified. In fact they're convinced that either the whole thing is a put-up affair by the present regime, or else the Kremlin itself is involved."

"The Kremlin?" I echoed incredulously. At the invocation of this name the atmosphere heightened, and for the next half an hour we spoke in whispers.

The conference that afternoon, at the Palais de Chaillot, offered no further clues. Chief Detective-Inspector Carnot, a massive gloomy man in a faded blue suit, took the chair, flanked by other agents of the Deuxieme Bureau. All of them looked tired and dispirited; by now they were having to check up on some dozen false alarms each hour. Behind them, like a hostile jury, sat a sober-faced group of investigators from Lloyds of London and Morgan Guaranty Trust of New York. By contrast, the two hundred dealers and agents sitting on the gilt chairs below the platform pre-

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sented an animated scene, chattering away in a dozen languages and flying a score of speculative kites.

After a brief résumé, delivered in a voice of sepulchral resignation, Inspector Carnot introduced a burly Dutchman next to him, Superintendent Jurgens of the Interpol bureau at The Hague, and then called on M. Auguste Pecard, This merely confirmed that the security arrangements at the Louvre were first-class and that it was absolutely impossible for the painting to have been stolen. I could see that Pecard was still not entirely convinced that it had gone.

". . . the pressure panels in the floor surrounding the painting have not been disturbed, nor have the two infrared beams across its face been broken. Gentlemen, I assure you it is impossible to remove the painting without first dismantling the bronze frame. This alone weighs eight hundred pounds and is bolted into the wall behind it. But the electric alarm circuit which flows through the bolts was not interrupted . . ."

I was looking up at the two life-size photographs of the front and reverse faces of the painting fastened to the screens behind the dais. The latter showed the back of the oak panel with its six aluminium ribs, contact points for the circuit and a mass of chalked graffiti enscribed over the years by the museum laboratories. The photographs had been taken the last time the picture was removed for cleaning, and after a brief bout of questioning it transpired that this had been completed only two days before the theft.

At this news the atmosphere of the conference changed. The hundred private conversations ceased, coloured silk handkerchiefs were returned to their breast pockets.

I nudged Georg de Stael. "So that explains it." Obviously the painting had disappeared during its period in the laboratory, where the security arrangements would be less than fool-proof. "It was not stolen from the *gallery* at all."

The hubbub around us had restarted. Two hundred noses once again were lifted to scent the trail. So the painting had been stolen, was somewhere at large in the world. The rewards to the discoverer, if not the Legion of Honour or a Knighthood, then at least complete freedom from all income tax and foreign exchange investigations, hovered like a spectre before us.

On the way back, however, Georg stared sombrely through the window of the taxi.

"The painting *was* stolen from the gallery," he said to me pensively. "I saw it there myself just twelve hours before it vanished." He took my arm and held it tightly. "We'll find it, Charles, for the glory of Northeby's and the Galleries Normande. But, my God,

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my God, the man who stole it was a thief out of this world!"

So began the quest for the missing Leonardo. I returned to London the next morning, but Georg and I were in regular contact by telephone. Initially, like all the others on its trail, we merely listened, ears to the ground for an unfamiliar foot-fall. In the crowded auction rooms and galleries we waited for the indiscrete word, for the give-away clue. Business, of course, was buoyant, every museum and private owner with a third-rate Rubens or Raphael had now moved up a rung. With luck the renewed market activity would uncover some distant accomplice of the thief, or a previous substitute for the Leonardo—perhaps a pastiche *Mona Lisa* by one of Verrocchio's pupils—would be jettisoned by the thief and appear on one of the shadier markets. If the hunt for the vanished painting was conducted as loudly as ever in the outside world, within the trade all was quiet and watchful.

In fact, too quiet. By rights something should have materialised, some faint clue should have appeared on the fine filters of the galleries and auction rooms. But nothing was heard. As the wave of activity launched by the displaced Leonardo rolled past and business resumed its former tempo, the painting became just another on the list of lost masterpieces.

Only Georg de Stael seemed able to maintain his interest in the search. Now and then he would put through a call to London, requesting some obscure piece of information about an anonymous buyer of a Titian or Rembrandt in the late 18th Century, or the history of some damaged copy by a pupil of Rubens or Raphael. He seemed particularly interested in works known to have been damaged and subsequently restored, information with which many private owners are naturally jealous of parting.

Consequently, when he called to see me in London some four months after the disappearance of the Leonardo, it was not in a purely jocular sense that I asked: "Well, Georg, do you know who stole it yet?"

Unclipping a large briefcase, Georg smiled at me darkly. "Would it surprise you if I said 'yes'? As a matter of fact, I don't know, but I have an idea, an hypothesis, shall we say. I thought you might be interested to hear it."

"Of course, Georg. So this is what you've been up to."

He raised a thin forefinger to silence me. Below the veneer of easy charm I noticed a new mood of seriousness, a cutting of conversational corners. "First, Charles, before you laugh me out of your office, let me say that I consider my theory completely fantastic and implausible, and yet—" he

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shrugged deprecatingly "—it seems to be the only one possible. To prove it I need your help."

"Given before asked. But what is this theory? I can't wait to hear."

He hesitated, apparently uncertain whether to expose his idea, and then began to empty the briefcase, taking out a series of looseleaf files which he placed in a row facing him along the desk. These contained what appeared to be photographic reproductions of a number of paintings, areas within them marked with white ink. Several of the photographs were enlargements of details, all of a high-faced, goatee-bearded man in mediaeval costume.

Georg inverted six of the larger plates so that I could see them. "You recognise these, of course?"

I nodded. With the exception of one, Rubens' *Pieta* in the Hermitage Museum at Leningrad, I had seen the originals of them all within the previous five years. The others were the missing Leonardo *Crucifixion,* the *Crucifixions* by Veronese, Goya and Holbein, and that by Poussin, entitled *The Place of Golgotha.* All were in public museums—the Louvre, San Stefano in Venice, the Prado and the Ryksmuseum, Amsterdam—and all were familiar, well-authenticated master-works, centre-pieces, apart from the Poussin, of major national collections. "It's re-assuring to see them. I trust they're all in good hands. Or are they next on the mysterious thief's shopping list?"

Georg shook his head. "No, I don't think he's very interested in these. Though he keeps a watching brief over them." Again I observed the marked change in Georg's manner, the reflective private humour. "Do you notice anything else?"

I compared the photographs again. "They're all crucifixions. Authentic, except perhaps in minor details. They were all easel paintings." I shrugged. "What else?"

"They all, at some time, have been stolen." Georg moved quickly from right to left. "The Poussin from the Chateau Loire collection in 1822, the Goya in 1806 from the Monte Cassino monastery, by Napoleon, the Veronese from the Prado in 1891, the Leonardo four months ago as we know, and the Holbein in 1943, looted for the Herman Goering collection."

"Interesting," I commented. "But few master-works haven't been stolen at some time. I hope this isn't a key point in your theory."

"No, but in conjunction with another factor it gains in significance. Now." He handed the Leonardo reproduction to me. "Anything unusual there?" When I shook my head at the familiar image he picked another photograph of the missing painting. "What about that one?"

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The photographs had been taken from slightly different perspectives, but otherwise seemed identical. "They are both of the original *Crucifixion,*" Georg explained, "taken in the Louvre within a month of its disappearance."

"I give up," I admitted. "They seem the same. No—wait a minute!" I pulled the table light nearer and bent over the plates, as Georg nodded. "They're slightly different. What is going on?"

Quickly, figure by figure, I compared the photographs, within a few moments seized on the minute disparity. In almost every particular the pictures were identical, but one figure out of the score or more on the crowded field had been altered. On the left, where the procession wound its way up the hillside towards the three crosses, the face of one of the bystanders had been completely repainted. Although, in the centre of the painting, the Christ hung from the cross some hours after the crucifixion, by a sort of spatio-temporal perspective—a common device in all Renaissance painting for overcoming the static nature of the single canvas—the receding procession carried the action backwards through time, so that one followed the invisible presence of the Christ on his painful last ascent of Golgotha.

The figure whose face had been repainted formed part of the crowd on the lower slopes. A tall powerfully built man in a black robe, he had obviously been the subject of special care by Leonardo, who had invested him with the magnificent physique and serpentine grace usually reserved for his depiction of angels. Looking at the photograph in my left hand, the original unretouched version, I realised that Leonardo had indeed intended the figure to represent an angel of death, or rather, one of those agents of the unconscious, terrifying in their enigmatic calm, in their brooding ambivalence, who seem to preside in his paintings over all man's deepest fears and longings, like the grey-faced statues that stare down from the midnight cornices and pediments of the necropolis at Pompeii.

All this, so typical of Leonardo and his curious vision, seemed to be summed up by the face of this tall angelic figure. Turned almost in profile over the left shoulder, the face looked up towards the cross, a faint flicker of pity investing the grey saturnine features. A high forehead, slightly flared at the temples, rose above the handsome semitic nose and mouth. A trace of a smile, of compassionate resignation and understanding, hung about the lips, providing a solitary source of light which illuminated the remainder of the face partly obscured by the shadows of the thundering sky.

In the photograph on my right,

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however, all this had been altered completely. The whole character of this angelic figure had been replaced by a new conception. The superficial likeness remained, but the face had lost its expression of tragic compassion. The later artist had reversed its posture altogether, and the head was turned away from the cross and over the right shoulder towards the early city of Jerusalem whose spectral towers rose like a city of Miltonic hell in the blue dusk. While the other bystanders followed the ascending Christ as if helpless to assist him, the expression on the face of the black-robed figure was arrogant and critical, the tension of the averted neck muscles indicating that he had swung his head away almost in disgust from the spectacle before him.

"What is this?" I asked, pointing to the latter photograph. "Some lost pupil's copy? I can't see why—"

Georg leaned forward and tapped the print. "*That* is the original Leonardo. Don't you understand, Charles? The version on your left which you were admiring for so many minutes was superimposed by some unknown retoucher, only a few years after da Vinci's death." He smiled at my scepticism. "Believe me, it's true. The figure concerned is only a minor part of the composition, no-one had seriously examined it before, as the rest of the painting is without doubt original. These additions were discovered five months ago shortly after the painting was removed for cleaning. The infrared examination revealed the completely intact profile below."

He passed two more photographs to me, both large-scale details of the head, in which the contrasts of characterisation were even more obvious. "As you can see from the brush-work in the shading, the retouching was done by a right-handed artist, whereas we know, of course, that da Vinci was left-handed."

"Well . . ." I shrugged. "It seems strange. But if what you say is correct, why on earth was such a small detail altered? The whole conception of the character is different."

"An interesting question," Georg said ambiguously. "Incidentally, the figure is that of Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew." He pointed to the man's feet. "He's always conventionally represented by the crossed sandal-straps of the Essene Sect, to which Jesus himself may have belonged."

I picked up the photographs again. "The Wandering Jew," I repeated softly. "How curious. The man who taunted Christ to move faster and was condemned to rove the surface of the earth until the Second Coming. It's almost as if the retoucher were an apologist for him, superimposing this expression of tragic pity over Leonardo's

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representation. There's an idea for you, Georg. You know how courtiers and wealthy merchants who gathered at painters' studios were informally incorporated into their paintings—perhaps Ahasuerus would move around, posing as himself, driven by a sort of guilt compulsion, then later steal the paintings and revise them. Now there *is* a theory."

I looked across at Georg, waiting for him to reply. He was nodding slowly, eyes watching mine in unspoken agreement, all trace of humour absent. "Georg!" I exclaimed. "Are you serious? Do you mean—"

He interrupted me gently but forcefully. "Charles, just give me a few more minutes to explain. I warned you that my theory was fantastic." Before I could protest he passed me another photograph. "The Veronese *Crucifixion*. See anyone you recognise? On the bottom left."

I raised the photograph to the light. "You're right. The late Venetian treatment is different, far more pagan, but it's quite obvious. You know, Georg, it's a remarkable likeness."

"Agreed. But it's not only the likeness. Look at the pose and characterisation."

Identified again by his black robes and crossed sandal straps, the figure of Ahasuerus stood among the throng on the crowded canvas. The unusual feature was not so much that the pose was again that of the retouched Leonardo, with Ahasuerus now looking with an expression of deep compassion at the dying Christ—an altogether meaningless interpretation—but the remarkable likeness between the two faces, almost as if they had been painted from the same model. The beard was perhaps a little fuller, in the Venetian manner, but the planes of the face, the flaring of the temples, the handsome coarseness of the mouth and jaw, the wise resignation in the eyes, that of some well-travelled physician witnessing an act of barbaric beauty and power, all these were exactly echoed from the Leonardo.

I gestured helplessly. "It's an amazing coincidence."

Georg nodded. "Another is that this painting, like the Leonardo, was stolen shortly after being extensively cleaned. When it was recovered in Florence two years later it was slightly damaged, and no further attempts were made to restore the painting." Georg paused. "Do you see my point, Charles?"

"More or less. I take it you suspect that if the Veronese were now cleaned a rather different version of Ahasuerus would be found. Veronese's original depiction."

"Exactly. After all, the present treatment makes no sense. If you're still skeptical, look at these others."

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Standing up, we began to go through the remainder of the photographs. In each of the others, the Poussin, Holbein, Goya and Rubens, the same figure was to be found, the same dark saturnine face regarding the cross with an expression of compassionate understanding. In view of the very different styles of the artists, the degree of similarity was remarkable. In each, as well, the pose was meaningless, the characterisation completely at odds with the legendary role of Ahasuerus.

By now the intensity of Georg's conviction was communicating itself to me physically. He drummed the desk with the palm of one hand. "In each case, Charles, all six paintings were stolen shortly after they had been cleaned—even the Holbein was looted from the Herman Goering collection by some renegade S.S. after being repaired by concentration camp inmates. As you yourself said, it's almost as if the thief was unwilling for the world to see the true image of Ahasuerus's character exposed, and deliberately painted in these apologias."

"But Georg, you're making a large assumption there. Can you prove that in each case, apart from the Leonardo, there is an original version below the present one?"

"Not yet. Naturally galleries are reluctant to give anyone the opportunity to show that their works are not entirely genuine. I know all this is still hypothesis, but what other explanation can you find?"

Shaking my head, I went over to the window, letting the noise and movement of Bond Street cut through Georg's heady speculations. "Are you seriously suggesting, Georg, that the black-robed figure of Ahasuerus is promenading somewhere on those pavements below us now, and that all through the centuries he's been stealing and retouching paintings that represent him spurning Jesus? The idea's ludicrous!"

"No more ludicrous than the theft of the painting. Everyone agrees it could not have been stolen by anyone bounded by the laws of the physical universe."

For a moment we stared at each other across the desk. "All right," I temporised, not wishing to offend him. The intensity of his idée fixe had alarmed me. "But isn't our best plan simply to sit back and wait for the Leonardo to turn up again?"

"Not necessarily. Most of the stolen paintings remained lost for ten or twenty years. Perhaps the effort of stepping outside the bounds of space and time exhausts him, or perhaps the sight of the original paintings terrifies him so —" He broke off as I began to come forward to him. "Look, Charles, it is fantastic, but there's a slim chance it may be true. This is where I need your help. It's obvious this man must be a great pa-

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tron of the arts, drawn by an irresistible compulsion, by unassuageable feelings of guilt, towards those artists painting crucifixions. We must begin to watch the sale rooms and galleries. That face, those black eyes and that haunted profile—sooner or later we'll see him, searching for another *Crucifixion* or *Pieta*. Cast your mind back, do you recognise that face?"

I looked down at the carpet, the image of the dark-eyed wanderer before me. *Go quicker,* he had taunted Jesus as he passed bearing the cross towards Golgotha, and Jesus had replied: *I go, but thou shalt wait until I return.* I was about to say 'no', but something restrained me, some reflex pause of recognition stirred through my mind. That handsome Levantine profile, in a different costume, of course, a smart dark-striped lounge suit, gold-topped cane and spats, bidding through an agent . . .

"You *have* seen him?" Georg came over to me. "Charles, I think I have too."

I gestured him away. "I'm not sure, Georg, but . . . I almost wonder." Curiously it was the retouched portrait of Ahasuerus, rather than Leonardo's original, which seemed more real, closer to the face I felt sure I had actually seen. Suddenly I pivoted on my heel. "Confound it, Georg, do you realise that if this incredible idea of your's is true this man must have spoken to Leonardo? To Michelangelo, and Titian and Rembrandt?"

Georg nodded. "And someone else too," he added pensively.

For the next month, after Georg's return to Paris I spent less time in my office and more in the sale rooms, watching for that familiar profile which something convinced me I had seen before. But for this undeniable conviction I would have dismissed Georg's hypothesis as obsessive fantasy. I made a few tactful enquiries of my assistants, and to my annoyance two of them also vaguely remembered such a person. After this I found myself unable to drive Georg de Stael's fancies from my mind. No further news was heard of the missing Leonardo—the complete absence of any clues mystified the police and the art world alike.

Consequently, it was with an immense feeling of relief, as much as of excitement, that I received five weeks later the following telegram:

CHARLES. COME IMMEDIATELY. I HAVE SEEN HIM. GEORG DE STAEL.

This time, as my taxi carried me from Orly Airport to the Madeleine, it was no idle amusement that made me watch the Tuileries Gardens for any sight of a tall man in a black slouch hat sneaking through the trees with a rolled-up

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canvas under his arm. Was Georg de Stael finally and irretrievably out of his mind, or had he in fact seen the phantom Ahasuerus?

When he greeted me at the doorway of Normande et Cie his handshake was as firm as ever, his face composed and relaxed. In his office he sat back and regarded me quizzically over the tips of his fingers, evidently so sure of himself that he could let his news bide its time.

"He's here, Charles," he said at last. "In Paris, staying at the Ritz. He's been attending the sales of 19th and 20th Century masters. With luck you'll see him this afternoon."

For once my incredulity returned, but before I could stutter my objections George silenced me.

"He's just as we expected, Charles. Tall and powerfully built, with a kind of statuesque grace, the sort of man who moves easily among the rich and nobility. Leonardo and Holbein caught him exactly, that strange haunted intensity about the eyes, the wind of deserts and great ravines."

"When did you first see him?"

"Yesterday afternoon. We had almost completed the 19th Century sales when a small Van Gogh —an inferior copy by the painter of *The Good Samaritan*—came up. One of those painted during his last madness, full of turbulent spirals, the figures like tormented beasts. For some reason the Samaritan's face reminded me of Ahasuerus. Just then I looked up across the crowded auction room." Georg sat forward. "To my amazement there he was, sitting not three feet away in the front row of seats, staring me straight in the face. I could hardly take my eyes off him. As soon as the bidding started he came in hard, going up in two thousands of francs."

"He took the painting?"

"No. Luckily I still had my wits about me. Obviously I had to be sure he was the right man. Previously his appearances have been solely as Ahasuerus, but few painters today are doing crucifixions in the *bel canto* style, and he may have tried to redress the balance of guilt by appearing in other roles, the Samaritan for example. He was left alone at 15,000—actually the reserve was only ten—so I leaned over and had the painting withdrawn. I was sure he would come back today if he was Ahasuerus, and I needed 24 hours to get hold of you and the police. Two of Carnot's men will be here this afternoon. I told them some vague story and they'll be unobtrusive. Anyway, naturally there was the devil's own row when this little Van Gogh was withdrawn. Everyone here thought I'd gone mad. Our dark-faced friend leapt up and demanded the reason, so I had to say that I suspected the authenticity of the painting and was protecting the reputation of the

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gallery, but if satisfied would put it up the next day."

"Clever of you," I commented.

Georg inclined his head. "I thought so too. It was a neat trap. Immediately he launched into a passionate defence of the painting —normally a man with his obvious experience of sale rooms would have damned it out of hand— bringing up all sorts of details about Vincent's third-rate pigments, the back of the canvas and so on. The *back* of the canvas, note, what the sitter would most remember about a painting. I said I was more or less convinced, and he promised to be back today. He left his address in case any difficulty came up." Georg took a silver-embossed card from his pocket and read out: "'*Count Enrique Danilewicz, Villa d'Est, Cadaques, Costa Brava.*'" Across the card was enscribed: *'Ritz Hotel, Paris.'*

"Cadaques," I repeated. "Dali is nearby there, at Port Lligat. Another coincidence."

"Perhaps more than a coincidence. Guess what the Catalan master is at present executing for the new Cathedral of St. Joseph at San Diego? One of his greatest commissions to date. Exactly! A crucifixion. Our friend Ahasuerus is once more doing his rounds."

Georg pulled a leather-bound pad from his centre drawer. "Now listen to this. I've been doing some research on the identity of the models for Ahasuerus—usually some petty princeling or merchant-king. The Leonardo is untraceable. He kept open house, beggars and goats wandered through his studio at will, anyone could have got in and posed. But the others were more select. The Ahasuerus in the Holbein was posed by a Sir Henry Daniels, a leading banker and friend of Henry VIII. In the Veronese by a member of the Council of Ten, none other than the Doge-to-be, Enri Danieli—we've both stayed in the hotel of that name in Venice. In the Rubens by Baron Henrik Nielson, Danish Ambassador to Amsterdam, and in the Goya by a certain Enrico Da Nella, financier and great patron of the Prado. While in the Poussin by the famous dilettante, Henri, Duc de Nile."

Georg closed the note-book with a flourish. I said: "It's certainly remarkable."

"You don't exaggerate. Danilewicz, Daniels, Danieli, Da Nella, de Nile and Nielson. Alias Ahasuerus. You know Charles, I'm a little frightened, but I think we have the missing Leonardo within our grasp."

Nothing was more disappointing, therefore, than the failure of our quarry to appear that afternoon.

The transfer of the Van Gogh from the previous day's sale had fortunately given it a high lot number, after some three dozen

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20th Century paintings. As the bids for the Kandinsky's and Leger's came in, I sat on the podium behind Georg, surveying the elegant assembly below. In such an international gathering, of American connoisseurs, English press lords, French and Italian aristocracy, coloured by a generous sprinkling of ladies of the demimonde, the presence of even the remarkable figure Georg had described would not have been overconspicuous. However, as we moved steadily down the catalogue, and the flashing of the photographers' bulbs became more and more wearisome, I began to wonder whether he would appear at all. His seat in the front row remained reserved for him, and I waited impatiently for this fugitive through time and space to materialise and make his magnificent entry promptly as the Van Gogh was announced.

As it transpired, both the seat and the painting remained untaken. Put off by Georg's doubts as to its authenticity, the painting failed to reach its reserve, and as the last sales closed we were left alone on the podium, our bait untaken.

"He must have smelled a rat," Georg whispered, after the attendants had confirmed that Count Danilewicz was not present in any of the other sale-rooms. A moment later a telephone call to the Ritz established that he had vacated his suite and left Paris for the south.

"No doubt he's expert at sidestepping such traps. What now?" I asked.

"Cadaques."

"Georg! Are you insane?"

"Not at all. There's only a chance, but we must take it! Inspector Carnot will find a plane. I'll invent some fantasy to please him. Come on, Charles, I'm convinced we'll find the Leonardo in his villa."

We arrived at Barcelona, Carnot in tow, with Superintendent Jurgens of Interpol to smooth our way through customs, and three hours later set off in a posse of police cars for Cadaques. The fast ride along that fantastic coastline, with its monstrous rocks like giant sleeping reptiles and the glazed light over the embalmed sea, reminiscent of all Dali's timeless beaches, was a fitting prelude to the final chapter. The air bled diamonds around us, sparkling off the immense spires of rock, the huge lunar ramparts suddenly giving way to placid bays of luminous water.

The Villa d'Est stood on a promontory a thousand feet above the town, its high walls and shuttered moorish windows glistening in the sunlight like white quartz. The great black doors, like the vaults of a cathedral, were sealed, and a continuous ringing of the bell brought no reply. At this a pro-

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longed wrangle ensued between Jurgens and the local police, who were torn between their reluctance to offend an important local dignitary—Count Danilewicz had evidently founded a dozen scholarships for promising regional artists—and their eagerness to partake in the discovery of the missing Leonardo.

Impatient of all this, Georg and I borrowed a car and chauffeur and set off for Port Lligat, promising the Inspector that we would return in time for the commercial airliner which was due to land at Barcelona from Paris some two hours later, presumably carrying Count Danilewicz. "No doubt, however," Georg remarked softly as we moved off, "he travels by other transport."

What excuse we would make to penetrate the private menage of Spain's most distinguished painter I had not decided, though the possibility of simultaneous one-man shows at Northeby's and Galleries Normande might have appeased him. As we drove down the final approach to the familiar tiered white villa by the water's edge, a large limousine came towards us, bearing away a recent guest.

Our two cars passed at a point where the effective width of the road was narrowed by a nexus of pot-holes, and for a moment the heavy saloons wallowed side by side in the dust like two groaning mastodons.

Suddenly, Georg clenched my elbow and pointed through the window.

"Charles! There he is!"

Lowering my window as the drivers cursed each other, I looked out into the dim cabin of the adjacent car. Sitting in the back seat, his head raised to the noise, was a huge Rasputin-like figure in a black pin-stripe suit, his white cuffs and gold tie-pin glinting in the shadows, gloved hands crossed in front of him over an ivory-handled cane. As we edged past I caught a glimpse of his great saturnine head, whose living features matched and corroborated exactly those which I had seen reproduced by so many hands upon so many canvasses. The dark eyes glowed with an intense lustre, the black eyebrows rearing from his high forehead like wings, the sharp curve of the beard carrying the sweep of his strong jaw forward into the air like a spear.

Elegantly suited though he was, his whole presence radiated a tremendous restless energy, a powerful charisma that seemed to extend beyond the confines of the car. For a moment we exchanged glances, separated from each other by only two or three feet. He was staring beyond me, however, at some distant landmark, some invisible hill-crest forever silhouetted against the horizon, and I saw in his eyes that expression of irredeemable remorse, of almost hallucinatory de-

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spair, untouched by self-pity or any conceivable extenuation, that one imagines on the faces of the damned.

"Stop him!" Georg shouted into the noise. "Charles, warn him!"

Our car edged upwards out of the final rut, and I shouted through the engine fumes:

"Ahasuerus! Ahasuerus!"

His wild eyes swung back, and he rose forward in his seat, a black arm on the window ledge, like some immense half-crippled angel about to take flight. Then the two cars surged apart, and we were separated from the limousine by a tornado of dust. Enchanted from the placid air, for ten minutes the squall seethed about us.

By the time it subsided and we had managed to reverse, the great limousine had vanished.

They found the Leonardo in the Villa d'Est, propped against the wall in its great gilt frame in the dining room. To everyone's surprise the house was found to be completely empty, though two manservants who had been given the day off testified that when they left it that morning it had been lavishly furnished as usual. However, as Georg de Stael remarked, no doubt the vanished tenant had his own means of transport.

The painting had suffered no damage, though the first cursory glance confirmed that a skilled hand had been at work on a small portion. The face of the black-robed figure once again looked upwards to the cross, a hint of hope, perhaps even of redemption, in its wistful gaze. The brush-work had dried, but Georg reported to me that the thin layer of varnish was still tacky.

On our feted and triumphant return to Paris, Georg and I recommended that in view of the hazards already suffered by the painting , no further attempts should be made to clean or restore it, and with a grateful sigh the director and staff of the Louvre sealed it back into its wall. The painting may not be entirely by the hand of Leonardo da Vinci, but we feel that the few additions have earned their place.

No further news was heard of Count Danilewicz, but Georg recently told me that a Professor Henrico Daniella was reported to have been appointed director of the Museum of Pan-Christian Art at Santiago. His attempts to communicate with Professor Daniella had failed, but he gathered that the Museum was extremely anxious to build up a large collection of paintings of the Cross.

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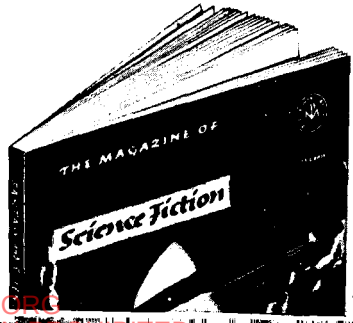

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